



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



KD4324

Boston Library Society,

No. 10 ~~BOSTON PLACE.~~
114, NEWBURY STREET,

ADDED TO THE LIBRARY

17 day of February 1886
To be returned in 5 Weeks 7 days.

A fine of Three Cents will be incurred for each day this volume
is detained beyond that time.

CANCELLED

1940

1898

562 MAY 21

350 MAY 28 JUL 30

622 ~~MAY 28~~ AUG 27

24 FEB 11

1899

613 AUG 18 SEP 1-
1900

21 OCT 27 NOV 15
1901

358 MAR 22 MAR 28

78 AUG 31 OCT 1-

448 DEC 5-

20 JUL 30 ¹⁹²¹ AUG 6-

0

THE HOUSE AT CRAGUE;

OR,

HER OWN WAY.

BY

MARY B. SLEIGHT.



NEW YORK:
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.,
13 ASTOR PLACE.

1886

~~SL 258~~
KD 4324.



COPYRIGHT, 1886,
By THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A DEAD CALM	5
II. ON THE BEACH	19
III. BREAKING MOORINGS	47
IV. SWEET LIBERTY	54
V. SMOOTH SAILING	95
VI. "SALLY"	107
VII. "THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY"	121
VIII. BEACH-PLUMMING	126
IX. DIDO'S OPINION	137
X. BREAKERS AHEAD	144
XI. GULLNEST	158
XII. A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT	167
XIII. HIS BEST FRIEND	188
XIV. A CHANGED PLAN	197
XV. A SPECK IN THE SKY	205
XVI. IN THE BREAKERS	214
XVII. DEAD-SEA APPLES	222
XVIII. A SAD HOME-COMING	229
XIX. AN UNEXPECTED RETURN	245
XX. A PLEASANT PRESCRIPTION	254
XXI. ADRIFT	271
XXII. AN EMPTY BOAT	288
XXIII. A LONELY VOYAGE	297
XXIV. A CLEW	303
XXV. FROM DARK TO DAWN	308
XXVI. A HAPPY FAMILY	327
XXVII. A SHIP ASHORE	334
XXVIII. A DEAD FOE	348
XXIX. ANCHORED	356

THE HOUSE AT CRAGUE.

CHAPTER I.

A DEAD CALM.

A STRANGER might have thought it regatta day at Crague; for, as far as the eye could reach, the bay was alive with boats,—pert little dories, riding the waves like cockle-shells; long, slim wherries, with swift oars flashing in the sun; and here and there a fishing-craft, dark and ungainly, moving sluggishly over the water; while sail-boats without number careened on the wind, the taut canvas looking dazzlingly white in the distance.

But it was not for a trial of speed that the sails were set that summer morning: the porgy season had begun, and the fleet was on its way to the fishing-grounds.

Near the wharf lay several larger vessels, one of which had just been boarded by a merry party of young people. The leader of this party was Eugene Pencroft, a keen-eyed, long-limbed fellow in a

sailor's suit of navy blue, with a broad-brimmed hat pushed back from his forehead, and tethered to a buttonhole with a strip of black ribbon. Gene Pencroft belonged to that class of men who become leaders, not from any desire to put themselves forward, but simply from their quickness to perceive and their readiness to do whatever needs to be done. His friend Donald Keith, who was helping him take the lunch-baskets on board, had an equally willing hand; but a certain shyness and self-distrust tended to keep him in the background, — a place in which he was not long permitted to remain, however, when Eugene was at the front. Donald, even taller than Pencroft, and with a sinewy ruggedness of build that gave him the look of a young Hercules, wore a gray hunting-suit, his favorite dress: but there was nothing ostentatious about either of them; and, aside from an air of trim cleanliness, they did not impress you as young men who gave much thought to their apparel.

A striking contrast in this respect was presented by Alva Drome; and though his foppishness was perhaps partly due to his age (for he was not yet out of his teens), there was nothing in his face to encourage the hope that he would ever outgrow it. Not that it was a bad face, but simply a face that was lacking in every essential element of strength. A receding chin, a nose that had never lost its infantile indefiniteness, a forehead on which the hair grew so low, that, had it belonged to a "girl of the period," there would have been no occasion for

bangs, — what could you expect in the way of strength from such a face? Still, the kindly eyes, and a mouth that was habitually smiling, redeemed it from ugliness; and, notwithstanding his fopperies and affectations, he had certain qualifications that made him a desirable comrade on a fishing expedition. He knew how to handle a line to perfection; and if there were ladies along, he took genuine pleasure in preparing bait and disentangling refractory hooks for them. People who have the faculty of making themselves “handy” are seldom unwelcome guests. He had that morning come from the Neck, three miles below Crague, purposely to join the party; and every one had given him a cordial greeting. But while he was ready to do a kindness for any lady on board, he put himself at Della Pencroft’s service with an impressiveness that did not fail to have an effect on that impressionable young woman. Della was Eugene’s sister, a pink-cheeked, placid-looking maiden, who had not yet outgrown the age at which girls are inclined to make heroes of just such manikins as young Drome.

As for Donald and Eugene, their attention, when not centred on their fish-lines, was confined almost exclusively to Blanche Braddington, a slender, dark-eyed girl, with fluffy rings of yellow hair blowing about her forehead, and with a profile as clean-cut as that of a Florentine cameo.

There were two other ladies belonging to the party, — Ray Braddington, whose face impressed you chiefly with its brightness and earnestness, and

Sally Decker, the captain's daughter; but, being several years younger than Blanche and Della, the young men, Pencroft and Keith at least, were disposed to regard them as little girls, and to treat them accordingly. Fortunately, however, these little girls were able to do their own baiting: and, if they chanced at any time to need the assistance of a masculine hand, the captain, when not busy with the ropes, was always at their service; for Sally was the apple of his eye, and Ray from her childhood had been a favorite with him. Many were the trinkets and curiosities that he had brought home to be divided between them in the days when he was commander of a ship; and Ray's thought of him was always associated with sandal-wood and amber, and luscious fruits that had ripened under tropical suns. For years the two girls had been playmates; and though of late the intimacy had lessened somewhat, Ray still kept up the friendship, and was delighted when an occasion like the present afforded them an opportunity for a little visit together.

"Now, captain, weigh anchor as soon as you like," said Eugene, as he stowed the last of the lunch-baskets into the caboose.

"Ay, ay, Pencroft! Just haul in the painter, will you?" answered the captain. "'And you young women, duck your heads there, if you don't want to go overboard!" he shouted, as he slacked off the sheet.

Blanche and Della, who were sitting on the lee-

ward side of the boat, hastily bent forward to let the boom pass; and presently the "Swan" was gliding over the waves with the ease and lightness of a genuine bird of the sea.

"Eh, but I like this!" said Keith, baring his head, and letting the wind blow through his crisp brown locks.

"Well, yes, it's a pretty fair day for boatin'," said the captain, leaning back with the sheet in one hand and the other on the tiller, as serene as if managing the "Swan" were the merest child's play, but at the same time taking note of the slightest veering of the wind. "I wouldn't mind sailin' all day with a breeze like this, but I'm afeerd it'll drive down the porgies. They're mighty skeery things; and there's nothin' they like so well as a still day, and a sky that's a *leetle* overcast—not egzactly a lowerin' sky, but one that's a *leetle* blurred-like."

"Perhaps the wind will go down by noon," said Pencroft, drawing a waterproof over Blanche's shoulders to protect her from the spray.

"Like as not," said the captain; "but I'd just as soon, and a *leetle* sooner, have it keep on blowin' till we get round the Shoals. We'll be there in half an hour at this rate."

Young Drôme took out his watch. "It is just ten now," he said, clicking with boyish pomp the bunch of charms pendent from the chain.

"What a pretty little anchor!" cried Della Pencroft.

"Aw! do you really like it, Miss Della?" drawled the boy. "I have a mate to it at home; and if you will wear it, you are quite welcome to it, and I shall be most happy."

"Oh, thank you! but I have no chatelaine," she said, still turning the dainty trinket in her fingers.

"But can't you wear it somewhere else? I have seen ladies wear them on their pencil-cords."

"I might hang it on this," she said, taking from her neck a narrow black velvet ribbon.

"Aw, now, that's just it to a dot," said Alva. And when the ribbon was replaced, the miniature anchor nestled under Della's dimpled chin.

The rest were too busy to notice this little by-play. Eugene and Donald were as usual devoting themselves to Blanche, the captain was eying his sail, and Sally and Ray were leaning over the taffrail, watching the riotous waves.

"Here we are!" shouted the captain, as the "Swan" rounded the Shoals.

Again Alva pulled out his watch. "Aw, just half an hour to a minute," he said, with another click of the pendants.

But the fishing-grounds lay a quarter of a mile beyond the Shoals, and it took ten minutes more to reach them.

"Stand by to cast anchor, Pencroft!" called the captain, as he brought the boat up into the wind.

"Ay, ay!" said Pencroft, promptly: "you've made good time, captain."

Then began the business of the day. Pencroft

set himself to opening clams for bait, and Keith put the hooks and lines in readiness, while young Drome assumed the responsibility of seeing that each lady was provided with all the requisite appliances; and soon every one was bending over the side of the boat, intent on the finny treasures below. Now and then a line would be hastily drawn in, the owner happy for the moment in the belief that a porgy had been captured; but usually the supposed prize proved to be only a bottle-fish, or a tangled mass of seaweed. Toward noon, however, the porgies began to bite in earnest; and, while the excitement lasted, the busy anglers had no thought for any thing but the work in hand.

"Do see what I've caught!" cried Blanche, when, after hooking her twentieth porgy, she drew up a spider-crab. "Oh, the hideous creature! Please take it off for me, Gene."

"Here, let me have it!" said Donald with eagerness. "I've been wanting to get hold of one, and that's a splendid specimen."

"I don't see how you can bear to touch it," said Blanche, shrinking back as Donald carefully removed it from the hook.

"It will not hurt you," said the young man, smiling down at her as he wrapped it in his pocket-handkerchief.

"I think I will not fish any more to-day," she said, beginning to wind up her line. "One bite of that sort is enough; besides, it is time for lunch."

"Aw! to be sure it is," responded young Drome: "it is after two."

Thus reminded, every one at once became conscious of being hungry; and the lunch-baskets were forthwith brought up, and the contents set out on the top of the caboose. Meanwhile the wind that had blown so briskly all the morning had been gradually dying away, and by three o'clock not a breath was stirring. A thin gray cloud had overspread the sky, the bay was like glass, and the few sails that remained in sight hung limp and motionless.

"Don't throw any of the fragments to the fishes, young women," said the captain, as Ray and Sally began clearing away the remains of the feast. "There's no tellin' but we shall be becalmed here till midnight."

"O Captain Decker!" cried Della Pencroft, in dismay.

"Well, child, what can be done about it?" said the captain. "When the Lord sends a dead calm, there's nothin' to do but sit still and make the best of it. All the frettin' and fumin' in the world won't start a breeze."

"If we can't go home, we can keep on fishing," said Donald, dropping his hook overboard. But for some reason the porgies no longer seemed inclined to bite; and presently Ray wound up her line, and begged the captain to "spin them a yarn."

"Oh! I'm spun out," said the captain. "I've been spinnin' yarns for you youngsters for the last forty years, more or less."

"Hold on, captain!" laughed Gene: "you are making us out rather ancient mariners."

"Well, we'll call it ten, then, if you object to forty," said the captain. "Anyhow, I've told 'em till you know 'em all by heart."

"But someway you have the faculty of always making them seem fresh, captain," said Keith persuasively.

"I don't know about that," answered the captain, settling himself against the gunwale: "the best of stories'll get stale if they're told too often. Still, if it'll help while away the time, I'll try to oblige you." And, having once begun, the captain as usual found it a hard matter to stop. For two full hours he held the attention of his hearers with his thrice-told tales; but in the midst of a thrilling account of an adventure with a whale, the faintest ripple of a breeze began to stir the sagging canvas.

"Hi, it's comin' at last!" he cried, breaking short his story, and springing to his feet. "Now, then, look out for your heads!"

In the west, long cloud-racks, dusky and ragged, were drifting hither and thither like rudderless ships; and by the time the captain of the "Swan" had shaken out the reefs and weighed anchor, the little breeze had become a gale.

"Aw, captain, I'm afraid we're going to have the wind in our teeth," said young Drome, as they swung round the Shoals.

"Better any time the wind in your teeth than a

dead calm, my boy," said the captain, who by skilful beating was steadily making headway.

"People who live in Crague have to grow used to a dead calm," said Blanche with an impatient gesture. "It makes me feel sometimes like firing the town cannon, just for the sake of a little excitement: it is so monotonous a life,—a life in which nothing happens," she repeated.

"Pshaw, now, Miss Blanche, you're twistin' my meanin'," said the captain. "I hadn't reference to any thing but the water. I can stand a dead calm on land well enough; and when a man's sea-farin' days are over, and he's got to go on the ways, so to speak, there ain't any better place to lay up in than Crague."

"I'm afraid it would make a dead calm on land and sea both for some of us, if you should go away," said Pencroft, in an undertone to Blanche.

"But I am going, nevertheless," she said, with smiling determination.

"How soon?" he asked, his face growing suddenly grave.

"As soon as I find an opportunity: that is all that I am waiting for."

There was a lurch of the boat at the moment, and a heavy wave swept over the bow. Blanche gave a little scream, and sprang up dripping like a mermaid.

"Let me unfasten your cloak and shake off the water before it strikes through," said Pencroft; and the instant the cloak was removed, Donald, without

a word, pulled off his jacket, and wrapped it about her.

"Oh! thank you, Donald," she said graciously; "but what will you do without it?"

"The captain always has one or two extra suits on hand in case of an accident, or a change in the weather," said Keith; and presently he emerged from the caboose enveloped in an oilcloth coat that had evidently seen years of service.

"Now I am waterproof," he said, putting up an umbrella to protect her from the flying spray; and as Pencroft had gone to see that Della was comfortable, he had her quite to himself for a little time.

Twilight was gathering when they reached the wharf; and with hasty good-nights to Sally and her father, the others took up the line of march for home. On arriving at the parsonage the company separated; young Drome, after a lingering farewell to Della, turning into the road leading to the Neck, while Pencroft and Keith escorted the sisters to Gullnest Cottage. At a short distance from the gate they met a tall, elderly man, who had evidently started to meet them.

"O papa!" cried Ray, running forward with the eagerness of a child, and catching his hand, — a hand which one needed only to touch, to know that it had a history, — "were you frightened about us, papa?"

"Not frightened exactly, darlie," he said, drawing her arm through his as a lover might have

done; "but I am always anxious when you are out in a sail-boat with such a wind blowing."

"It was the calm, rather than the wind, that delayed us," she said; and leaving Blanche to entertain Donald and Eugene, she began an animated account of the day's adventures.

"Here is your coat, Donald; and I am very grateful to you for it," said Blanche, on reaching the gate, Donald having declined to go in. "I should have been chilled through without it."

Donald merely bowed. He had no knack for making fine speeches, nor, indeed, for saying any thing in a case like this, where he had a blissful consciousness of having received tenfold more than he had given; but he laid the gray jacket across his arm with a half-caressing motion as if it had suddenly grown precious to him, and turned homeward, still wearing Captain Decker's oil-cloth coat.

"What in the world possessed you to stay so?" said a sharp, querulous voice, as the girls entered the sitting-room. "I should think you might have a little more regard for my feelings, when you know how nervous I am."

"The wind had no regard for our feelings, mamma," said Ray with a laugh, stopping to put a hassock under her mother's feet before taking off her hat and cape: "we were calm-bound for hours."

"It is always something," said her mother fretfully.

"Oh, but you should see the fish we caught, mamma! They are the finest we have had this sea-

son, and you are to have some of them for your supper. That reminds me: I must go tell Dido about them." And, having drawn a table to her mother's side, and lighted a lamp for her, she hastened to the kitchen.

Blanche, who, without waiting for her mother to finish her remarks, had gone up-stairs to change her dress, did not make her appearance again until the supper-bell rang.

"Who came home with you?" asked Mrs. Braddington, as Blanche took her place at the table, blooming and fresh as a carnation pink.

"Eugene and Donald," answered Ray, from behind the tall tea-urn.

A look of displeasure gathered on her mother's face. "Those young men are becoming entirely too attentive," she began.

"I wish you could have been with us, mamma. We had a lovely time," said Ray, intent on changing the subject; and her father taking the hint, and coming to her rescue, so brisk a conversation was kept up for the remainder of the meal, that Mrs. Braddington had no opportunity to continue her fault-finding.

"If this wind doesn't blow up a storm, Ban, we must go beach-plumming to-morrow," said Ray, that evening, after their mother had gone to her room. "Donald says the plums are beginning to ripen."

Blanche shrugged her shoulders, and made no answer.

"Don't you care to go?" asked Ray.

"Oh, yes!" said Blanche indifferently. "I suppose it is the proper thing to do; but we have gone every year since I can remember, and I hate a routine. The truth is, I am tired of this sort of life. As Captain Decker says, 'Better the wind in your teeth than a dead calm.'"

"I declare, Ban, I believe you are growing sentimental," laughed Ray. "I don't see how busy, healthy people can find life a dead calm anywhere," she added, her voice becoming serious: "there is always so much to do, and so much to think about."

"Now, then, little parson, don't begin to preach," said Blanche, taking up a lamp. "Come, if we are going beach-plumming to-morrow, it is time for us to be in bed."

But the morrow proved rainy, and it was not until the following week that fair weather was fully established.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BEACH.

IT was like a dream of silence : a motionless sea, bright as a floor of sapphire, stretching on and on until the outer edge was lost in the far, faint skyline ; a level beach on which the silvery waves, just tipped with foam, were breaking as noiselessly as snow-drifts melt under April sunshine ; here and there a white sail gleamed against the horizon, —

“As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean:”

and the sky itself was scarcely stiller than the blue deep in which it mirrored its glory.

Inland rose long ridges of sand-dunes, gloomy and cavernous-looking in the shadowy crannies, but yellow as new gold on the smooth surfaces where the sunlight fell, flooding them from summit to base ; and they, too, were wrapped in silence.

But a different dream from this was occupying the tall, fair girl, who, with her hands clasped tightly about her knees, sat gazing across the sea, — the mocking, miserly sea, beyond which lay the life she coveted.

- “I *must* go, Ray!” she said, with sudden energy. “This sort of life is killing me. I hate it all: the sleepy little town, the commonplace people, the sea and the sand, and every thing about it. It is forlorn and dismal. Why, think of it, Ray! The world is full of great cities, with houses like palaces, and women who dress like queens. Why can’t we be where we can at least enjoy the sight of them, instead of staying all our lives in this dreary place, listening to the droning of the waves?”

Ray, who was tossing crumbs from the lunch-pail to a little sandpiper that was hopping fearlessly back and forth, neither turned nor spoke for a moment; and Blanche meanwhile sat looking seaward with set lips and sullen brow.

They had found beach-plums in abundance, and, having filled their baskets, had come down to the shore to rest. Both had been silent for some time; and Ray, while apparently watching the hungry bird, had been drinking in the beauty about her with happy eyes. Blanche was too preoccupied to give it a thought, and had any one questioned her a day or two later in regard to it, she would have found it impossible to describe it; yet years afterward, like a negative that had been hidden away from the light, it all came back to her, — the great, still sea, the shadowy ships in the distance, the yellow sand-hills bathed in sunlight, and the two girls, herself and Ray, with the little sandpiper, and the baskets of beach-plums at their feet, making a part of the picture. But in her present mood the very stillness of

the scene fretted her. It would have suited her better, had the billows come dashing in like war-horses with their white manes streaming in the wind, and to have had the sky darkened with scurrying clouds.

"I wish you could go, Ban," said Ray, at last; "and I would gladly go with you if I could."

"I can go, and I shall," said Blanche, in a half-defiant voice. "I have the fifty dollars that aunt Rachel gave me, that I have been saving up for a year; and once there I can establish myself as a music-teacher. I shall have to do something, I suppose."

Ray did not answer; and her sister started up impatiently, and began pacing the shore.

"Of course I should rather have you with me," she said presently. And, stopping before Ray, she caught up a handful of sand, and let the shining particles sift through her fingers as she spoke. "Father and mother could manage in some way to do without us; but fifty dollars, I am afraid, would hardly be enough for two, and I don't imagine that you have a penny of yours left."

"No," said Ray quietly, without any allusion to the fact that she had paid out her own fifty, little by little, for household expenses, rather than trouble her father for the necessary funds. "And even if I had, we couldn't both go at once. Perhaps when you come back, I can take my turn. But I dread to have you go alone, Ban dear. They say the city isn't a very safe place for a young girl; and you are

so young, and so — so — well, not so ugly as you might be, Bansy." And Ray looked up with sisterly pride at the tall girl with the shining hair and glorious eyes.

"You silly little grandmother!" laughed Blanche, in no way displeased with Ray's artless homage. "If I am not positively ugly, I am in no danger of being persecuted for my beauty; while as for my age, I am nineteen, quite old enough to take care of myself. No, Ray, my mind is made up."

"I wonder what Donald will say about it," said Ray, filling a bit of bread to the sandpiper.

"He has no right to say any thing," answered Blanche, flushing.

"But you know well enough that he loves you, Ban."

"So you might say of two or three others, if their own words are to be believed; but I want no country clowns for lovers," said Blanche, with fine disdain.

"Some of them have warm, true hearts," said Ray. "You will find no truer friends than Gene and Donald, the world over."

"Very likely, my dear; but I am more than willing to resign in your favor, provided you will help me get away," said Blanche, seating herself again at Ray's side. "I am going next week to Cliff Haven to visit aunt Beverley; and from there, instead of coming home, I intend to take the boat to New York."

"Without saying a word to father and mother about it?" asked Ray, in a startled voice.

"What would be the use, child?" said Blanche petulantly. "Father would tell me to wait for brighter days, and then turn to his music again to re-assure himself that brighter days are in store; while poor mother, much as she wants me to have a taste of city life, would fret herself sick over my having to go in such a poverty-stricken way. I don't want to seem undutiful, but I must see for myself. Ray, the great world of which we have read and talked and dreamed; and some time I shall come back, like a good fairy, and carry you all away from this dismal place."

"O Blanche! darling, I want you to go, since you have so set your heart upon it, indeed I do; but I am sure it will not be right for you to go without their consent. If you would only wait, Ban, until the way opens for you!"

"I have waited all my life for that," said Blanche. "Now I am going to open a way for myself. It is useless to try to turn me, Ray. I only wish that you were going with me: still, I shall feel more comfortable about father and mother for your being at home; and, when you know that I am really gone, you can easily smooth it over to them."

"But, Ban, it will break their hearts," urged Ray.

"I have no fear of that," answered Blanche coolly. "Hearts are not broken as easily as you think. Of course it will startle them; but when they are once convinced that there is no help for it, they will be sensible enough to make the best of it."

And Blanche took up another handful of sand, and

sifted it through her fingers ; while Ray sat silent, her chin in her palm, and her eyes fixed on the falling grains with an intentness that suggested the possibility that she was trying to count them.

It was growing late. In Cuppanog Light-house the sun's last rays were kindling a brighter beacon than ever the old keeper's lamp sent forth on the darkest night ; from the marshes a faint mist was beginning to rise ; and the little sandpiper had hopped away to its hiding-place.

"It is time to go home," said Blanche. But Ray did not seem to hear her.

"If you would only tell father and mother about it, Ban, and get their consent first," she pleaded.

"Don't trouble yourself about that, dear," said Blanche soothingly. "I shall write to them from Cliff Haven, and explain all my plans."

"But promise me one thing, Ban," said Ray, clinging to her sister's hand, — "that if you should fail, or if you should be tired and disappointed by and by, you will come back to us."

"Oh, of course ! In that case there would be nothing else to do. But I don't intend to fail," she said confidently ; and, letting go Ray's hand, she took up her basket.

Ray lingered for another look at the sea. How many hours they had spent there ! From her earliest recollection it had been their favorite haunt, and every rock and cliff along the beach was associated with Blanche. Indeed, in all the seventeen years of her life, there was no day of which Blanche did not

form a part. They had played together, studied together, and together had planned delightful impossibilities for their future; and now Blanche was going, and she was to be left alone. In her heart was a foreboding that nothing would ever be the same again; and she longed to throw herself on the sand, and cry aloud. But Blanche was waiting for her; and, stifling her sobs, she took up her basket of plums and the lunch-pail, and turned to join her.

"Come!" called Blanche impatiently.

"I'm coming," cried a strong, clear voice above them; and, looking up, they saw Donald Keith making his way down the nearest sand-bluff, with his fish-pole over his shoulder, and his dog at his side.

"Why, Donald! Where did you come from?" exclaimed Blanche.

"From over the hills," answered the young man, at the same time changing the basket of beach-plums from her arm to his own, with the manner of one who had a right to serve her.

"Wasting your time, as usual, hunting for new specimens of mollusks and polyps, I suppose," laughed Blanche.

"I succeeded, at all events," said Donald; "at least, I found some fine varieties of crustacea."

"Then keep your distance, please," said Blanche coquettishly. "I have no fancy for such things."

"Oh! they are safe in the handkerchief at the end of my fish-pole," he said, taking his place at

her side; and the two fell into step, leaving Ray to follow in their shadow.

Had she been given to selfish thoughts, the girl might have wondered if it was always to be her lot to walk in the shadow. But she was not thinking of herself: her thoughts were of the two walking together, tall and fair, with the ruddy light on their faces, and the world before them. She had grown accustomed to think of them as walking together through life; and, in spite of Blanche's careless words, she could not separate them.

"Poor Donald! it will be hard for him," she said to herself.

"What, Ray! You there?" said Donald, turning so suddenly that she half fancied he had overheard her thought. "What a quiet puss you are! Here, let me have those plums: I need something more to balance me. And now come, walk where we can see you."

Ray laughed as she gave up the basket. Donald had been like an elder brother to her ever since she could remember, and she was used to his abrupt ways.

"The path is too narrow for three," she said; and, being in no mood to take part in the conversation, she presently fell behind again, and became absorbed in her own thoughts.

It was three miles from the beach to Gullnest Cottage; but to Ray, accustomed to walking and fond of it, the distance had never before seemed long. But a burdened heart makes weary feet, and

she was glad when they came in sight of home. Just as they were entering the gate, Blanche screamed with fright at finding a fiddler-crab that had escaped from Donald's handkerchief, travelling down her arm.

"Oh, don't lose him!" cried Donald, as Blanche shook off the little creature with a look of disgust: "you don't know what a beauty he is." But Blanche protested that she wanted no near acquaintance with it; and Donald, smiling at her fears, returned the truant to his handkerchief, and said good-night.

Gullnest Cottage was a quaint, old-fashioned house, with high peaked roof and dormer windows, shaded by two tall elms. In front, a wide walk, bordered with box, led from the gate to the porch; while in the rear a well-worn footpath through the heart of the old orchard guided you to the shore, and on still days you could hear from the little back stoop the lapping of the waves. Within doors, on one side of the broad hall, were the parlor and dining-room; on the other, the library and a bedroom; and from nearly every window, there was a glimpse of the water and of wooded hills in the distance.

This was the home in which the two girls had lived from their earliest remembrance (for Blanche was a baby in the nurse's arms when the family came to Crague, and it was here that Ray first saw the light); and to Ray the old place, with all that pertained to it, was precious beyond price. The seagulls, for which it had been named, and which

any day in the fall and spring might be seen dipping their silvery wings in the bay; the bay itself, with its softly singing waves; the wide expanse of sky, the distant thud of the breakers on the beach, — all belonged with it, and were as much hers as if she had held a title-deed to them. Even in the stars that rose and set on its horizon, she had a loving sense of ownership. George Eliot says that “the best introduction to astronomy is to think of the nightly heavens as a little lot of stars belonging to one’s own homestead;” and all the knowledge Ray had of astronomy she had gained by studying, with her father’s help, the stars that came nightly within range of the flat roof of the old porch. They were familiar to her as the faces of old friends, and from no other spot would they have looked quite the same. Crague, too, was dear to her. The little village, numbering some two hundred inhabitants, was scattered over a sandy peninsula, with the ocean on the one side, and the bay on the other. Its annals dated back of the Revolution, and many of its houses were at least a century old. On some of these ancient dwellings the primitive knockers and thumb-latches still bade defiance to door-bells and porcelain knobs, while dormer-windows and gambrel-roofs refused to give place to the more recent styles of architecture. There were houses with seven gables, and houses that seemed all gables; and within there were great garrets full of bric-à-brac that would have been treasure-trove to an antiquarian of the present day. They were not partial to new paint in

Crague. Whatever hue the majority of the houses might once have been, time, with the help of sun and storm, had toned it down to the softest of wood-tints ; and the inhabitants seemed to feel that a fresh coat of color would be an insult to Nature. But here and there, as if tiring of the prevailing monotony, Nature herself gave a bit of brightness. The little brick church was half covered with English ivy, and tufts of moss clung lovingly to many a decaying roof and paling. In fact, the whole place had an old-time look ; so much so that any thing modern would have been an incongruity. The principal street ran the entire length of the village, and terminated in a small open park, about which clustered the few shops that supplied the physical needs of the people. On a side street, sufficiently remote from the hum of business to secure scholastic quiet, stood the schoolhouse ; while just beyond it, on a slight eminence, the church looked down upon the bay, its ancient spire, like a faithful sentinel, keeping steadfast watch above the quiet spot where slept the many generations of Crague's dead, and serving also as a landmark for the living, for its white shaft was visible for miles across the water, and without it the Crague fishermen would have been often put out in their reckonings.

In former days, Crague, like many another seaport town, had done a thriving business in fitting out vessels for the whale-fisheries ; but the long wharf, storm-beaten and decayed, together with a multiplicity of retired sea-captains, alone remained

to tell of its past greatness. The sea-captains were the chief capitalists of the place, the rest of the population being mostly fishermen. The former class lived in frugal comfort, on the interest of their savings; the latter lived on fish, that commodity being their principal source of revenue, as well as their main diet.

In a place thus divided, one might naturally expect to find marked social distinctions. But the inhabitants had married and inter-married until everybody was in some way related to his next-door neighbor; thus effectually obliterating the "line of demarcation," and making a community of interests that rendered gossip a dangerous pastime.

The fact that the Braddingtons were not related to any one in the village had, to begin with, tended to isolate them; but the isolation was equally due to the fact that Mrs. Braddington, from the first, had persistently discouraged all social intercourse with the people in general. The minister's family, and the Keiths of Point Place across the cove, were the only neighbors whom she condescended to recognize; and even to these she showed very little genuine friendliness.

A stranger meeting Mrs. Braddington at this stage of her history would have been inclined to wonder how a man like Jerome Braddington ever came to marry her. But this Mrs. Braddington was little better than a caricature of the beautiful woman whom, twenty years before, Jerome had made his wife. At that time she was the lead-

ing singer in the church in which the young man was the organist; and, fascinated with her beauty no less than with her wonderful voice, he had invested her, lover-like, with all the attributes of an ideal womanhood, and loved her as

“The sweetest woman, for her sweetness’ sake.”

And she, an orphan with no fortune but her voice and face, had accepted him chiefly for the reason, that, already widely famed as an organist and composer, and with the prestige of belonging to an old family, he could bestow upon her a name and a position of which she might well be proud. Those who had only a casual acquaintance with the lady considered it an excellent match, and were thoroughly sincere in congratulating Braddington; and the latter accepted their congratulations with the conviction that he was the most fortunate lover in the world. Yet even then there were lines about the full red lips, which, had Jerome been as apt in the reading of character as he was in the reading of music, would have made him hesitate to commit his happiness to this woman’s keeping.

“Love is not a hood, but an eye-water,” says Emerson; but, unhappily, it is seldom effectual as an eye-opener until marriage has brought a nearer range of vision. Still, for the first six months, these two were very happy. The young organist was an honored guest in the choicest circles; and his girlish wife, with her double dower of beauty and song, was everywhere welcomed and admired.

It is true, they saw comparatively little of each other, Jerome's days being devoted chiefly to his profession, hers to shopping and calling, while the evenings were taken up with the usual routine of fashionable life ; but Evelyn did not regard this distribution of their time as a misfortune. She was satisfied in knowing that her husband was steadily gaining wealth and fame ; while, as for him, it was happiness enough to know that she was happy.

It is possible, that, had this prosperity continued, the discordant traits that afterwards showed themselves in her character might have lain dormant forever ; but she was poorly prepared for reverses. From the moment of her entrance into society, life had been a succession of triumphs, and she had flattered herself that it was to be so always ; that she was one of the favored few destined to immunity from the griefs and pains that ordinarily fall to mortals. Hence the abrupt waking from her dream was doubly hard to bear. They were at a concert when the blow came. Jerome had been holding the audience spellbound with his marvellous playing, his eyes turning constantly with a look that was almost worship to the box where Evelyn sat radiant and complacent ; when suddenly, just as the last note was dying away like a mountain echo, he saw with a thrill of horror a vivid tongue of flame lapping the ceiling. His first thought was how to prevent a panic ; and, while the rest of the musicians were wondering what their leader was about, he stepped quietly to the front of the platform, intending to

dismiss the assembly with the announcement that he would be unable to finish the programme: but at that moment some one in the gallery caught sight of the flaming tongue, and, before he could speak, the cry of "Fire!" rang through the building. Instantly all was confusion. The flame had seized the stage-hangings, and to the terrified crowd the whole hall seemed in a blaze. Jerome sprang forward with the hope of reaching his wife, but it was like battling against an angry sea; and finding that he was making no headway, he gave such help as he could to those nearest to him. One poor woman, blind with fright, rushed, moth-like, into the very heart of the fire. Forgetful of his own peril, he dashed in after her, and had barely succeeded in rescuing her when a falling beam pinned him to the floor. The remainder of the night was a blank to him. When consciousness returned, he found himself on his bed, stiff and helpless, with both hands so drawn and distorted as to be henceforth practically useless so far as his profession was concerned. It was not an inspiring discovery for one who but yesterday was in the vigor of young manhood, elate with present success, and with a brilliant career in prospect. He had spent years in perfecting himself in his art, had toiled and studied until he had become an acknowledged leader — and this was the end! A weak man would have turned his face to the wall, and prayed to die, and, getting no answer to his prayer, would have taken life with his own hands, too cowardly to do battle with ad-

verse circumstances. And Braddington was human. The thought of living with every thing so altered was bitterness itself. Bitterest of all was the thought of the change it would be to Evelyn. Still all was not lost, since she was spared to him; and his heart went out to her with a new intensity of love and tenderness. But to Evelyn, in her present mood, love was but a poor compensation for the loss of wealth and power. If her husband had been killed outright, — at least, if she had found herself a widow with an ample fortune at her disposal, — though she might have put on the deepest of mourning, and shed tears of genuine sorrow, she would have felt that life was not wholly a blank; but to have him left scarred and maimed, with the prospect of being a burden to himself and her for the remainder of his years, was a state of things to which she found it impossible to be resigned. “It would never have happened if he had not been so reckless about helping others,” she said angrily, and with a feeling of unreasoning hate against the unknown woman for whom he had made the priceless sacrifice. “He must needs put his own life in danger to save that of some poor creature, who probably would never have been missed; and I must suffer all my days for his rashness.” And leaving him to the care of a hired nurse, she shut herself in her own room, and gave way from morning till night to childish lamentations.

Then, for the first time, Jerome became conscious of her shallowness and selfishness. Then he knew

that henceforth he must carry hidden in his heart a burden beside which that for which men gave him pity and sympathy without stint was as dust in the balance. But, after all, it matters not so much what we love as how we love.

“All great loves that have died, dropped dead,” —

says a certain sweet poet; but the “great love” never dies. It may sit with its head beneath its wings, joyless and songless; but the archer has no arrow that can slay it. Braddington had given this woman the love of a royal soul; and, though she gave him no adequate return, he could no more stop loving her than a mother can stop loving a thankless child. Before men and angels he had vowed to love and cherish her till death; and now there was nothing to do but to bear with her, to shield her, and to comfort her, and, if possible, lead her to see the truth which the Master had meant them both to learn from this sore affliction. He himself was already learning it, gaining for the first time, in this day of his desolation, a faint glimpse of what it is possible for the Divine love to become to a lonely and hungry soul.

“Misfortune,” says St. Pierre, “resembles the Black Mountain of Bember, situated at the extremity of the burning kingdom of Lahore. While you are climbing it, you see before you only barren rocks; but when you have reached its summit, you see heaven above your head, and at your feet the kingdom of Cachmere.” It took many a long and

weary struggle for Braddington to climb the "Black Mountain" with which this sudden turn in his path had brought him face to face, many a backsliding into the "Slough of Despond," many a battle with the unseen powers of darkness; but at last the heights were gained, and "on every height there lies repose."

It was during this transition period that Blanche was born, — a child whose wondrous beauty captivated all hearts; and Jerome, while welcoming the little one for its own sake, rejoiced in the thought that its coming would be the beginning of better things for Evelyn, lifting her out of herself and her trouble. And at first the young mother was really happy; the congratulations of friends, the admiration bestowed upon the child, and the warm interest that every one evinced in her husband's misfortune, creating an excitement which made her for the time forget to complain. But this state of things could not last. New babies in other homes demanded attention and admiration; and a new leader in the place which Jerome had so long filled soon made the fickle public lose sight of its old favorite. His profession had been his only dependence; and though it offered him a lucrative income while it lasted, it had not enabled him to provide against such an emergency as this, his wife's fondness for a luxurious style of living having put economy out of the question. Some of his friends proposed his taking a class, and offered to secure for Evelyn her old place in the choir: but his shattered health would

not admit of his teaching; and as for Evelyn, so far from feeling grateful, she considered herself humiliated in being asked to become again a paid singer.

A year or two previous to these events, a bachelor uncle had bequeathed to Braddington the house at Crague; and though at the time, with the prospect of a grand career before him, he had smiled at the bequest as one of uncle Isaac's "freaks," considering it little better than an encumbrance, now, with his best hopes blighted, he began to think of it as a possible haven, a place of retreat at least, if worst came to worst. That affairs were fast reaching this pass, was soon evident; and though he would gladly have remained in town, both for Evelyn's sake and his own, — that she might have congenial society, and that he himself might keep pace with the world's march, even though he had no longer a part in it, — seeing that the removal was an absolute necessity, he submitted to it uncomplainingly. At Crague he would have at least the music of the sea to cheer him while he gathered up his shattered forces. But to Evelyn, Crague meant utter isolation from the life she loved; and from the first she set herself stubbornly against it. But there was no alternative. Their income for the present would be only the interest on the few thousands realized from the sale of furniture and pictures, — a sum barely sufficient to pay their house-rent in the city, but in a place like Crague, with a house rent-free, it would supply all their actual needs. So, without further delay,

their few treasures were packed, Jerome's being chiefly his books and musical instruments; Evelyn's, her silks and laces, together with enough fine furniture to lend a look of style to the little cottage. She would have been glad to give the impression that they were going only for the summer, "just for a change;" but Jerome said frankly to every one who was interested in their plans, that they expected to make Crague their home for an indefinite period.

It was June when they came to Gullnest. Roses and honeysuckles in full bloom were climbing in close companionship over the latticed porch, birds twittered merrily in the tree-tops, bees were buzzing among the clover-heads, and the wind from the sea was swaying the long grass on the lawn. Just then the brown cottage under the elms did not seem an uninviting home. Even Mrs. Braddington was betrayed into an exclamation of delight. The house had been thoroughly renovated, and every thing was in readiness for them,—the furniture having been sent on in advance, with two of the servants to superintend the arrangement of it.

"It is a little Eden," said Jerome, with a silent benediction on his uncle Isaac's memory; and Evelyn, at the moment, was not disposed to contradict him.

For the next three or four months there was much to make it pleasant. Baby Blanche, who had been ailing before leaving the city, grew plump and rosy in the bracing air; several of their city friends were boarding with the Keiths on the Point, and were

frequent guests at the cottage ; picnics and sailing-parties were an every-day occurrence ; and before the summer was over Evelyn graciously admitted that Crague was far less monotonous than she had expected to find it. It was not until winter shut down upon them, hedging them in from the world, and throwing them on their own resources for enjoyment, that she realized their isolation, and began to rebel again. It is only an exceptionally great mind that can endure solitude without becoming either morbid or bitter. An Elijah, or a John the Baptist, relegated to the wilderness, will find manna and honey there, for the soul no less than for the body ; but to the majority of mortals, solitude is likely to bring, to a certain extent, both mental and moral depletion. Braddington, fortunately, had resources within himself ; but Evelyn, like a spoiled child, refused to find happiness in any thing. Her only solace was her beautiful Blanche. She made the child her idol ; and when a year later Ray came, — a mere morsel of a baby, with no beauty but her brown eyes, dreamy and soft as the Indian-summer sky that brooded over the day of her birth, — she gave her but an indifferent welcome. But for whatever loss of mother-love the little one suffered, she was compensated, if there can be any compensation for so cruel a loss, in the love bestowed upon her by her father. In his heart she found a warm place ready and waiting. He loved Blanche tenderly, but his wife had so entirely appropriated the child to herself as to make him hesitate to claim any fath-

erly privileges. Even her childish demonstrations of affection for him, Mrs. Braddington seemed to regard with jealousy; and thus defrauded in a measure of his first-born, his heart turned all the more lovingly to the new-comer, the very indifference with which the mother regarded her serving to endear her to him. From the time she was able to lisp his name, she was his playmate and companion; but he still kept his hold on Blanche.

As the two grew up, he watched with keen interest the unfolding of their minds. He was their only teacher, and they proved themselves apt scholars. Blanche, quick in all her studies, was especially gifted in music. It seemed almost an intuition, the readiness with which she played the most difficult scores; yet this very readiness was a misfortune to her, for it kept her from learning by experience that "the way to the blessedness that is in music, as to all other blessednesses, lies through weary labors." At sixteen she was an admirable performer; yet in listening to her you were impressed with the feeling that she loved to play, not because she loved music, not because she found in it an answer to any want within herself, but only because it cost her no effort, and elicited unbounded admiration from the majority of her hearers. Her mother declared her playing perfect; but to her father, the lack of soul in her touch was a defect for which the most brilliant execution could not atone. From the time that his hands were disabled, he had devoted himself to musical composition; and, finding that his wife

took no interest in his work, he had comforted himself with the hope that Blanche would in time become his interpreter. To this end he had given her the most careful and thorough training; but he was not long in discovering, that, accurate as her playing was, she was never in sympathy with the music. He bore the disappointment in silence; but soon in this, as in countless other things, he learned to turn to Ray. Ray would have given the world for the gift Blanche prized so lightly; and yet it was to Ray, who, though she thrilled at every sweet sound and exulted in the grand choruses of winds and waves, could seldom execute the simplest piece correctly, that her father submitted the choicest of his compositions, knowing that she would catch the meaning of the most intricate parts, even to its subtlest hint. Indeed, her eagerness to get at the soul of what she was playing was usually the chief cause of her inaccuracies; and for this very reason her inaccuracies were never discordant. In the same way, in her other studies, she often failed in the wording of the text, but never in her quick, spirited rendering of the import; and her father would pat her brown head, and call her his little enthusiast. But she herself was greatly annoyed by these seeming failures, for one of the most intense desires of her heart was to fit herself to be of service to her father. Even had she not loved music passionately for its own sake, she would have spared no pains to reach his standard: as it was, she applied herself to the study of it with an ardor

and assiduity that in time left Blanche far behind her. Blanche was not given to application, and long before that afternoon on the beach she had come to think herself too old to be confined to a routine of lessons; hence, during the greater part of the day, Ray was her father's sole companion. Half the morning, while he sat at his desk composing, she would sit in the little bay-window poring over her books, lifting her eyes with loving reverence now and then to the grave face opposite, but never in any way disturbing him. Like Klopstock's Meta, who was "always present at the birth of the young verses," Ray was usually present at the birth of a new melody; and as soon as the last note was written, the musician would call her to the piano to give the mute signs speech. Sometimes in his busiest moments, hearing her stealing across the room, he would put out his hand, and draw her to his side; and leaning down with her cheek to his she would wait for him to speak.

While a mere child, she had discovered his sorrow and loneliness. Once, burning with a sense of injustice under a sharp and unmerited reproof from her mother, she rushed into the study, and threw herself into his arms with a burst of passionate weeping; and drawing her closer, he said gently, "It is hard, I know, but we must be patient with the mother, little Ray." In that moment she caught a glimpse of her father's burden, and a new bond of sympathy was established between them. Young as she was, she put herself side by side with him,

and silently covenanted with her own heart that for his sake she would be patient, never doubting that in time their patience would be rewarded. But as yet their only apparent reward was in the gentleness and self-restraint which constant practice had made habitual to them.

Crague had yearly grown more odious to Mrs. Braddington. The summers were no longer enlivened with visits from city friends, the Point having been abandoned for more fashionable resorts; and her daughters, for lack of other society, were compelled to associate with young people whom she considered altogether their inferiors. Betty the nurse, after ten years of faithful service in the capacity of a housemaid as well, had left them for a home of her own; and as their reduced income would not admit of their employing any one to fill her place, Dido, the old black cook, had been for the last eight years their only dependence; and to be obliged to keep house with but one servant was, in Mrs. Braddington's estimation, to be poverty-stricken indeed. The hope that by some happy gyration of fortune's wheel they might eventually be able to return to the city, and resume their old style of living, had been from the first all that reconciled her to Crague; and becoming convinced as time went on that the fulfilment of the hope was as distant as ever, she had given way to the spirit of discontent until she was a confirmed pessimist. Nothing suited her, nothing was as it should be; and the record of her ceaseless repining showed itself in every line of the face that

had once been beautiful. Her gift of song, too, had departed; for a discontented, querulous soul will effectually untune the sweetest voice. She was out of harmony with all her surroundings, and every one near her had to suffer in consequence.

To Blanche, easy and careless except when her will was crossed, it was a comparatively small trial; but to Ray, keenly alive to every indication of unhappiness in those she loved, her mother's gloomy face and fretful words were like incessant prickings of fine needles, and, being naturally of a quick and vehement temperament, a degree of self-discipline was involved of which it was not possible for Blanche to form the slightest conception. Yet it was on Blanche that Mrs. Braddington expended all her sympathies, lamenting daily that her beautiful darling, in the bloom of young womanhood, should be debarred from the advantages of fashionable society. The fact that she could not bring her husband to regard their isolation as a misfortune vexed her beyond measure: while any suggestion that matters might be worse brought a sharp retort, and the intimation that he alone was responsible for their changed fortunes. Usually he took these upbraidings very quietly; but sometimes, goaded beyond endurance, he would seize his hat, and dash out of the house, not daring to trust himself to answer; and Ray, who always stole out after him, would find him pacing the shore with folded arms, and head bent on his breast. Had it been Blanche, he would have taken her by the hand, and led her home. But

Ray's presence never seemed to disturb him ; there was balm in her silent sympathy ; and when the evil spirit had been exorcised, he would come with a shell, a pebble, or a bit of sea-moss, and fall to discussing its beauty without the least reference to the subject that was uppermost in their hearts. But once, when after a provocation that had made her cry out, " Oh, you hurt him, mother ! you hurt him ! " she had followed him down to the shore, he suddenly stopped in his walk, and throwing himself on the sand beside her, buried his face in her lap, and wept like a child. Ray never forgot that moment.

" O, father ! father ! " she cried, " why does God let it be so ? "

" Hush, darling ! I have a story to tell you, " he said, lifting his head and taking her in his arms. " There was once a beautiful princess, who, coming under an ' evil eye, ' was so changed that her dearest friends could scarcely recognize her. A hideous mask seemed to cover her face, and the eyes that had been so soft and bright grew cold and dull. Even her voice was changed, and those who had once loved her the most tenderly shrank from her with the feeling that she was no longer human. But while her husband was lamenting her unhappy fate, it was revealed to him, that, if he could be patient with her, the princess would in time become herself again. It all depended upon him, for Love was the only magician that could set her free ; and every harsh word addressed to her, and every word of

censure concerning her that was breathed to others, would serve to strengthen and prolong the evil spell. It was partly due to him, that it had been sent upon her; for he had worshipped the beautiful creature as something more than mortal, and this was his punishment. With a penitent heart he accepted the sentence; and by degrees he learned to subdue his naturally fierce spirit, and to restrain his anger and impatience towards the poor princess, whose real self was concealed by that horrible mask. But he had long to wait. Years went by, and brought no change; and sometimes he was almost ready to despair. But one day, while he was praying for release, he heard a voice saying, 'Thy prayer is answered, the lesson is learned, the spell is broken;' and before the voice had ceased the princess glided in, and knelt beside him. Then the mask dropped from her face, and the eyes grew sweet and tender. Love had conquered."

Ray lifted her head from his bosom, and kissed him softly; and the two rose up with shining faces, and went home hand in hand like happy children.

CHAPTER III.

BREAKING MOORINGS.

HAD there been any relatives in town so situated as to be able to give the girl the advantages of society, Mrs. Braddington would not have hesitated to send Blanche from her ; but, unfortunately, under the circumstances, the family connection was very limited, her husband's only near relatives being an uncle and aunt, aged and feeble ; while on her side there was no one but Mrs. Beverley, her mother's sister, and her home was at Cliff Haven. Aunt Beverley was a large-hearted, motherly woman ; but Mrs. Braddington, until very lately, had not cared to cultivate her acquaintance, for aunt Beverley after her husband's death, finding herself under the necessity of doing something for her own support, had disgraced the family, in her niece's estimation, by opening a dressmaking and millinery establishment. Even the hats and bonnets, made and trimmed in the latest style, sent semi-yearly to herself and the girls, failed to heal her wounded pride. But recently Mrs. Beverley had retired from business, and with the fruits of her ten years' toil had bought a pleasant home at Cliff Haven, a seaport town some

twelve miles from Crague; and, Cliff Haven being a favorite summer resort, Mrs. Braddington was no longer indifferent to her aunt's friendship. Consequently when, on the morning after the beach-plumming expedition, Blanche demurely proposed a visit to Cliff Haven, she met with no opposition from her mother, except on the ground that she had not a suitable outfit, — a statement to which the girl mentally assented as being only too true; and even her mother's reiterated assurance that aunt Beverley, for her own sake, would see to it that she was properly equipped, did not reconcile her to the thought of starting on her journey so poorly apparelled. She was beautiful, and she knew it; and with a quick eye for the fitness of things as pertaining to herself, she delighted in dressing as artistically as possible. Thus far her heaviest cross in life had been the inability to gratify to any extent this artistic taste; and now, as she began her preparations for leaving home, she realized anew, and more keenly than ever before, the inconvenience of poverty.

"If you would tell father and mother your whole plan, Ban, perhaps they would be able to help you," said Ray, who, while giving Blanche all the assistance in her power, and putting her entire wardrobe at her service, went about oppressed with a sense of guilt.

"That would spoil every thing," said Blanche. "They would never give their consent; and, with or without it, I must and will go."

"Don't say that, Ban," pleaded Ray. "Think

how they will feel, and I shall feel that I have helped to deceive them."

"Don't trouble yourself about the deception, my dear," said Blanche. "I'll take all the responsibility of that on my own shoulders."

"But I can't help being troubled about it, Ban; for I am sure that some time you will regret it. Promise me, oh, promise me, Ban! that you will wait at Cliff Haven until you get their consent."

"I'll promise you one thing, my dear," said Blanche, beginning to fear that Ray might feel it her duty to divulge the secret: "I will do nothing about going until I have had a frank talk with aunt Beverley."

And on the strength of this assurance, Ray, unsuspecting of Ban's mental reservation that nothing that aunt Beverley might say should turn her from her purpose, took heart, and gave herself to helping on the preparations.

"If I had one good suit, I should be satisfied," said Blanche, as she held up the gray alpaca that was to serve as a travelling-dress. "Mother has given me some lovely laces, but I have nothing that I can wear them with; and I feel positively ashamed to go even to aunt Beverley's with only this and my old empress-cloth for an outfit."

"Can't you do any thing with your blue silk?" asked Ray, looking up from her work, — a lapful of footing which she was quilling into dainty ruffles.

"Oh! that's as old-fashioned as the hills, and too scant to make over. Besides, it is really shabby.

Donald Keith gave it the finishing touch the last time I wore it, by dropping one of his pets — a horrid green caterpillar — on the front breadth. That boy needs looking after, Ray. His fondness for frogs and caterpillars is making a barbarian of him. I wish he would copy Gene Pencroft. Gene is a gentleman."

"Never mind Donald and Gene," said Ray. "I have just thought of something! There is my brown silk, Ban. I have never worn it, and it is as good as it was the day mother gave it to me. It has a full train skirt, and will make over beautifully."

"Do you really mean it, Ray?" cried Blanche, dropping the gray alpaca. "It will seem a shame for me to take it, and yet it is the very thing I need."

"Then take it, dear, and say no more about it," said Ray, tossing the footing into the work-basket, and going down on her knees beside an old trunk in the corner. And presently from its inner depths the brown silk was evolved, carefully folded in an old linen sheet.

A year or two previous, Mrs. Braddington had given Blanche her choice between the blue silk and the brown; and, Blanche having chosen the blue as the better adapted to her complexion, the brown had fallen to Ray. The blue had been one of Mrs. Braddington's evening dresses in her prosperous days; and Blanche, who was her mother's counterpart in height and figure, had sighed, as she tried it on and turned herself before the glass, for an oppor-

tunity to wear it as it was. But the good people of Crague would have been scandalized at the sight of a young woman with bare neck and arms; and Blanche, regretfully yielding to the pressure of public opinion, had remodelled it to suit the prevailing fashion, and with characteristic improvidence had made it her common Sunday suit. The fact that it was, in her own estimation, the only suit she had that was fit to wear to church, had served as an excuse for her not going to Sunday school that summer. If Ray chose to have a dozen dusty little feet shuffling about her skirts, and a dozen grimy little hands manipulating her gloves and fan, she was welcome to do so: for herself, she preferred to keep the young vandals at a distance, at least when she had on her blue silk. Ray, on the contrary, feeling that the dresses were far too elegant for common wear, had quietly put the brown silk away, and had contented herself with plainer fabrics, much to the dissatisfaction of her mother, who was anxious to have the distinction between her daughters and the girls of Crague as marked as possible in dress, as in every thing else.

A fine, faint odor of musk and lavender pervaded the air as Ray shook out the lustrous folds.

"Oh, 'perfumes of Arabia!'" cried Blanche ecstatically. "Why, Ray, it's as fresh as when it was bought! Just think of being able to wear such dresses every day! Poor mother! No wonder she grieves for the time when a silk like that was no more to her than a ten-cent calico is to us."

"Silks are well enough in their way; but for every-day wear, there is nothing like calico — at least for me, under present circumstances," said Ray with philosophic cheerfulness. But a sigh, which Blanche was too occupied to notice, followed this brave utterance; for the brown silk had been the girl's one treasure, to be looked at in secret, and handled with loving fingers as a miser handles his gold.

"Just wait till my ship comes in, child, and you shall have calicoes to your heart's content, and French at that. I wonder what would be the prettiest way to trim this." And Blanche, knitting her delicate brows, surveyed the gown with a look of profound perplexity.

"Why not wait till you get to aunt Beverley's, and ask her advice? She will know all the latest styles," said Ray, taking up her quilling again.

"That will be the better way, I suppose," said Blanche; "only I am afraid she will want it made so plain that I shall look as prim as any Quaker in it."

"My dear Ban," said Ray with the gravity of a middle-aged matron, "if you expect to fight your way through life successfully, don't be afraid of looking prim and plain. From all I can learn about the wicked world from newspapers and books, I should say it is the only safe way for a woman to look."

"I declare, Ray," exclaimed Blanche, "if it were not for those perverse ripples in your hair, I should

say you were cut out for an old maid. If the Lord had meant me to look plain and prim, he would have made me so to begin with; and as long as he hasn't, I have no desire to pervert the original design."

"If there were no dreadful men in the world, it would make no difference how pretty you are. That's all I'm afraid of, Ban. Some of them will be falling in love with you, and wanting to marry you; and then you will never care to come back to dear old Gullnest." And Ray choked down a sob, and bent her head lower over her work.

"Don't borrow trouble on that score, child," said Blanche, secretly exulting at the thought of so delightful a possibility. "Hark! was that the front gate?"

Ray turned to the window with wet eyes.

"Yes; and here come Donald and Gene."

"Dear me!" said Blanche, running to the glass, "what a fright I look like! Do put this hairpin in for me, puss, and stop work, and come down. They will very likely ask for you."

"Then you must excuse me to them," said Ray. "I can't take time to see them this afternoon."

"Nonsense, child! you can bring your work with you," said Ban, giving her handkerchief a touch of violet-extract, and turning from the glass with a coquettish little blue bow in her hair.

But Ray's heart was full, and she was glad to be left alone.

CHAPTER IV.

SWEET LIBERTY.

TO Blanche, who had never been more than ten miles from home, a visit to Cliff Haven would at any other time have been an affair of importance; but with the city in view as her ultimate destination, Cliff Haven became simply a stopping-place on the journey. There was an exultant sense of freedom in her heart as she took her seat in the stage that autumn morning: still the consciousness of the deception she was practising made an unwelcome undertone to her rejoicing. Her father, who had somewhat old-fashioned ideas as to the propriety of young ladies travelling alone, had insisted on accompanying her; and his presence was another disturbing element. To him, too, the journey was a novelty; for with the exception of going for a day to the city when business made it imperative, — something which had happened only twice within Blanche's remembrance, — he seldom left home, his crippled hands, about which he was almost morbidly sensitive, making him shrink alike from strangers and old friends. Yet he was fond of travel, and under ordinary circumstances Blanche would have

enjoyed his company. As it was, his efforts to entertain her, and his lover-like care for her comfort, only helped to make her miserable. He was to her the impersonation of every thing noble and manly; and, much as she wanted to see the world, the thought of grieving him was far from pleasant. Her courage almost failed her when, the next morning, she heard him charging aunt Beverley to take good care of his little girl. "And if you can't come with her when she is ready to return, let us know in time, and I will come for her," he said, as he shook aunt Beverley's motherly hand. "She is too precious to be left to the stage-driver's care," he added, stroking the "little girl's" cheek. "I think you could trust me with old 'Joshway,' papa," she said, trying to smile, as he stooped to kiss her. The parting with her mother had been comparatively easy; for Mrs. Braddington, chiefly solicitous to have her make such an impression on aunt Beverley as to secure future invitations, had mingled with her farewell kisses so many needless cautions and suggestions that Blanche had broken away from her with a laugh, declaring that she would not be able to remember half of them unless they were written down.

This sort of maternal solicitude had long been one of her greatest trials. Even the knowledge that love was at the bottom of it did not prevent its being irksome to her. She had never been able to gain permission to join in any of the Crague merry-makings without hearing a long tirade on the folly

of putting herself on a level with people so greatly her inferiors ; and whenever a young man showed her the least attention, her mother began at once to regard him with suspicion and dislike. With Ray it was different. " Ray was still so young ; and Ray was neither a beauty nor a genius ; and, besides, Ray was a thorough Braddington, and the Braddingtons, notwithstanding their ' blue blood,' had no family pride." So Ray, by virtue of her youth and comparative plainness, enjoyed a degree of freedom which Blanche had never known, and which in some respects she had hardly coveted ; and Ray, being a young woman of democratic tendencies, had made the most of her privileges. At Mr. Pencroft's request she took a class in the Sunday school, and even consented to play the rickety little melodeon, enduring with cheerful resignation the discords of the worn-out keys for the sake of the good people, who, without the help of the instrument, would have thought it impossible to sing. The village girls found her a delightful companion. She was a favorite, too, with the fishermen and their families, and was as much at home in their primitive " keeping-rooms " as in the parsonage parlor. Yet this heartsome interest in those about her came neither from a sense of duty, nor from a desire to be looked up to, but simply from a feeling of fellowship, — an affinity for humanity in general, that made it impossible for her to hold herself aloof. She would have been ready to agree with Lessing, had she chanced to come upon that wise man's words, that

“it is better to live among bad people than to live apart from everybody ;” and, happily, she was not one to absorb evil.

It was owing largely to this identifying of herself with the people of Crague, that, while she sympathized warmly with Blanche in her longing to see the world, she did not feel that being compelled to live in Crague was in any sense a hardship. Now that Blanche was gone, however, she experienced for the first time in her life a genuine feeling of loneliness, and the uncertainty as to the duration of her absence made it all the harder to bear.

At the end of a week a letter came from Blanche, saying that she was enjoying her visit, and that aunt Beverley was helping her make over the brown silk. That was the substance of it ; not a word in regard to coming home, neither was there the slightest hint that she had any intention of extending the journey : and Ray took courage, feeling that aunt Beverley had doubtless discouraged the plan. But a few days later came another. It was a family letter ; and, after speaking of her visit and aunt Beverley’s kindness, she proceeded to inform them with the utmost nonchalance, that, having consulted her aunt on the subject, she had decided to go to the city and try her fortune as a music-teacher. Aunt Beverley had promised her a letter of introduction to her sister-in-law, and she did not apprehend any difficulty. She felt that she was old enough to be doing something for her own support ; and as there was no opening in Crague, she was confident that they

would not disapprove of her going to the city. Ray read it aloud, with her heart in her throat.

"Dear child! If they were the right sort of people, it would be very pleasant for her to go to make a visit," said Mrs. Braddington. "But I should never consent to her going as a music-teacher: it would ruin her prospects."

"Daughter, let me have an early breakfast," said Mr. Braddington quietly. "I shall take the stage in the morning, and bring our little girl home. The city is no place for one like her."

"It is Crague that is no place for her, and no one can blame her for wanting to go elsewhere," said his wife angrily. "If you had any spirit, Jerome Braddington, you would make an effort yourself to get away."

"I am working for it, my dear; and I hope the time will come when we can all go together to the city for a visit."

"'Working for it,' oh, yes!" she said sneeringly. "No doubt we shall go with our coach and four when that wonderful symphony is done, if we live till then."

"Father, can I go with you?" asked Ray.

"What's the use, child? It will only be doubling the expense," interrupted her mother. "Besides, I don't see why either of you need to go. You might better send the money to the dear child, and tell her to go for a visit if she wishes to do so."

"I should like to have Ray with me, if you do not need her, my dear," said Mr. Braddington.

"Oh! take her, of course, if you are determined to go. Don't mind me," said his wife with the air of a martyr. And by eight the next morning, Ray and her father were on the way to Cliff Haven.

Meanwhile Mrs. Beverley was passing through a strange experience. Blanche had really consulted her in regard to going to the city, but that was only half the truth; for though she had given Mrs. Beverley the impression that the plan had been freely talked over at home, that sensible woman strenuously opposed it, and it was not until she found that her arguments were of no avail, that she so far yielded as to give the letter of introduction for which she had asked. If the girl was determined to go, there was no one to whom she could intrust her with more confidence than to her sister-in-law, Mrs. Hedgway. Still, after the letter was written, her heart misgave her, and she begged Blanche to do nothing until she heard from home again; and Blanche had apparently acquiesced. But that afternoon Mrs. Beverley, wishing to pay a visit to a sick friend, excused herself for an hour or two, and on her return was greeted by the cook with the information that Miss Blanche had gone. Hastening to her room, she found pinned to the toilet-cushion this brief note of explanation:—

DEAR AUNTY, — Pardon my unceremonious leave-taking. I am sorry not to be able to say good-by; but I have decided that it is best for me to go this afternoon, and I fear I shall miss the boat if I wait for your return. I shall go at once to Mrs. Hedgway's. With many thanks for your kindness, I am

Your affectionate niece,

BLANCHE BRADDINGTON.

Mrs. Beverley threw down the note, and pulled out her watch. It was half-past three, and the boat would start at four. There was scarcely a chance of her being in time to stop the truant; but calling a carriage, she promised the driver double pay if he succeeded in reaching the wharf before the boat started. The horses were fresh, and the man did not spare the lash; but when they came in sight of the landing, the boat was a quarter of a mile away. The only thing left for her to do was to telegraph to Mrs. Hedgway. That evening she wrote to Mr. Braddington. As the letter could not go, however, until the following afternoon, the travellers arrived before it was mailed.

"Where is Blanche?" asked Mr. Braddington almost fiercely.

"My poor girl! Why could she not have waited?" he said, when Mrs. Beverley had explained; and, dropping into a chair, he buried his face in his hands. Ray went to him, and put her arm about his neck.

"Don't be troubled, father," she said brightly. "We'll go to-morrow and bring her back. She will not want to stay when she sees how grieved you are." But her father shook his head.

"It will be a hard matter to persuade her to come back," he said; and, as he lifted his face, Ray saw in it a look of age that it had never worn before.

"Yes," said aunt Beverley: "she had set her heart on going, and she will be very unwilling to return."

Still, there was a possibility that she might yield ; and having sent a letter home to allay Mrs. Braddington's fears, they took the boat the next afternoon for New York. Mr. Braddington, in his impatience, would have preferred to go by rail ; but in that case they would arrive late in the evening, and would be obliged to spend the night in town. Besides, Mrs. Beverley saw that he needed rest ; and, feeling that Blanche was in good hands, she prevailed upon him to wait.

It was Ray's first experience in travelling by steamer ; and she sat on deck watching the changing scenery till the daylight waned, and the moon let down her silver ladder from the darkening sky.

Mrs. Hedgway and her family were at breakfast when they reached the house.

"Tell Miss Braddington that her father wishes to see her," was the message given to the servant who answered the bell. Blanche started when she heard the summons ; but, hastening to the parlor, she threw herself into her father's arms, and begged him not to be angry with her.

Still, though she had really been ill at ease, and was anxious to have matters comfortably adjusted, she had no intention whatever of surrendering. Had her father found her at Cliff Haven, she might have consented to go back ; but having once reached the borders of the enchanted land, it would be ignominious to retreat. In vain her father reasoned with her : she had an answer ready for every argument.

Ray was half beside herself with grief. The fact

that she had been in Blanche's confidence burdened her with the feeling that she was a sharer in her deceit, and the desire to undo the evil made her doubly earnest in entreating her to go back. But Blanche was immovable. If her father and mother would come to the city, she would gladly live at home, no matter how plain a home it might be; but she would never return to Crague, except under compulsion. In this extremity her father turned to Mrs. Hedgway.

"I would advise your daughter to go home, by all means," said the lady. "The city is a dangerous place for a young girl away from home and friends; and the danger is greater, I think, for country girls than for those who have always lived here. Now and then, it is true, one finds her niche, and fills it successfully; but the majority of those who come would far better remain at home. I know that that is not a progressive idea," she said, as Blanche bridled her pretty head; "but I have seen so many make a failure of it, that I do not feel like encouraging any one to make the experiment. If this young lady were homeless, and obliged to come, it would be different. Still, if she insists on entering the lists, I am willing to do all in my power to help her. She can have her home with me, and I will interest myself to secure pupils for her."

"I am very grateful to you, madam," said Brad-dington with a long-drawn sigh; and then and there he laid down his weapons, and retired from the field. Blanche had won the day.

All that reconciled him to his defeat was the knowledge that Blanche had Mrs. Hedgway for a friend ; and as he looked into her face — a face full of womanly strength and sweetness — he felt confident, that, so far as Blanche would permit it, she would act a mother's part. " Ah ! if she had had a mother, poor child, — a real mother, — it might have been different," was the thought that involuntarily followed, but he was too loyal to dwell upon it.

" Possibly, after all, the experiment may result in good," he sorrowfully soliloquized. " It is only by its own dust that the diamond can be cut and polished ; and it is only by our own experiences, the real and grinding experiences of life, that we can be fitted for our place : the experiences of others will avail us little ; and perhaps my poor girl would learn her lesson in no other way."

Ray watched him with sorrowful eyes, and secretly determined to make one more effort to bring Blanche to reason.

They had the day before them, as the boat would not leave till near night ; and after lunch Mr. Bradington asked Blanche to go with them to call on his aunt and uncle. Glad of the opportunity, Blanche accepted the invitation with alacrity, and ran up-stairs to dress, taking Ray with her.

" Now sit down there, and make yourself comfortable," she said, drawing an easy-chair to the window ; " and don't look so solemn, puss. There ! what do you think of my hat ? Isn't it lovely ? Aunt Beverley gave me the feather."

It was lovely; and Ray, being a genuine girl, suffered it for a moment to beguile her of her sad thoughts. It was lovely in itself, and it harmonized perfectly with her new walking-suit, — the brown silk remodelled in the latest style; and when presently Blanche tripped down-stairs, she was, to look at, a daughter of whom any father might be proud. But if Jerome felt a thrill of pride as he glanced at the elegant girl, a tenderer feeling filled his heart as he looked down at Ray's earnest face, just now so sad and troubled. Blanche at first made an effort to talk; but as neither Ray nor her father responded, she, too, became silent.

On reaching the house, a large and venerable-looking mansion in the upper part of the city, they were admitted by a white-wooled negro, who, having grown gray in the family, at once recognized "Marsa J'rome," and, without any formality, ushered them into the library. On first entering the house, one was impressed with its stillness and emptiness. The great parlors had a dim, shadowy aspect, as if abandoned to the ghosts of bygone days, and the wide hall looked unused and cheerless; but the library, where the two old people sat dozing in their arm-chairs, was full of warmth and brightness. A blazing wood-fire made a ruddy glow on the hearth, and a bay-window on either side let in a flood of sunshine.

"Marsa J'rome an' de young misses, please, ma'am," said Nebuchadnezzar, bobbing his snowy head.

Aunt Rachel seemed bewildered for an instant with Neb's sententious introduction and the sight of two unfamiliar faces ; but " Marsa J'rome " was no stranger to her, and, stately as a queen in spite of her eighty years, she rose and greeted him with an old-time courtesy and a motherly kiss.

" And these are your daughters ? " she said, extending a wrinkled little hand incased in a black lace mitt to each of the girls. " You are very welcome, my dears. " Then she turned to her husband, who, owing to his deafness, had not heard the introduction ; and taking up an ear-trumpet that lay on a small stand at his elbow, she repeated one by one their names.

" Jerome ! Come here and sit by me, Jerome, " cried the old man, putting out his hand, for, owing to failing sight and rheumatic limbs, he rarely left his chair ; and Jerome went and sat down by him, and, with the help of the ear-trumpet, was soon absorbed in conversation.

They had not seen each other for years ; and as the uncle took the crippled hands, a vague feeling of remorse awoke in his heart with the consciousness that the promise made to his brother on his death-bed, when Jerome was a mere stripling, that he would look after the boy, had not been very faithfully kept. To be sure, Jerome, in his infatuation with music, had grievously offended him by refusing to go into his counting-house : but the promise was none the less binding ; and now, determined to find out the true state of his affairs, he plied him with

questions, until Jerome, in spite of his natural reticence, was forced to reveal the fact that his income for many a year had been a mere pittance. "But we are hoping for better days, uncle," he said cheerfully. "My music is beginning to be in demand; and if my life is spared, I trust I shall be able to accomplish with my head the work that my hands failed to do."

"Tush, boy! you will starve at that," said the old man contemptuously. "The world is as fickle about music as about every thing else in the way of luxuries. What it praises one day, it condemns the next." And with all his old vehemence he went on to denounce the folly of depending for a living on any thing so precarious as musical composition. Jerome listed with a patient smile. In his younger days he had been wont to vindicate his choice with much warmth against his uncle's attacks: now he was content to sit silent, and let him have his say.

Meanwhile aunt Rachel, in her sunny nook, was entertaining the girls with curiosities and engravings, and at the same time mentally taking their measure. Even with her somewhat impaired sight, she could not be blind to Blanche's beauty; yet, for some reason not clearly defined to herself, she was conscious that she did not approve of her, — perhaps her brightness and sparkle were too dazzling, perhaps too shallow, she could not tell which, — but her old eyes rested on Ray with a glad and satisfied expression.

"Why not leave this little girl with us?" she

said, laying her hand on Ray's shoulder. "She is named for me, and I think I have a claim to her."

Mr. Braddington started as if a highway robber had suddenly demanded "his money or his life," and made a motion as if about to put both arms around the child. Ray gave him a quick, loving look, and slipped her hand into his.

"My little girl must speak for herself," he said, re-assured, yet willing to prove her.

"Thank you, aunt Rachel; but I can't leave father and mother. They could hardly spare us both," she said simply. Involuntarily her father stooped and kissed her.

"This young lady," he said, turning to Blanche, and trying to smile, "has been growing independent. She thinks she is old enough to be doing something for her own support, and is going to make an effort to obtain a music-class; so for the present we shall leave her in town."

"Then, she must come often to see us," said aunt Rachel graciously; but to Ray's disappointment she did not ask her to stay with them. She would have felt so much safer about Blanche if they could have left her with aunt Rachel.

On returning to Mrs. Hedgway's, there was only time for a hasty good-by, for which Blanche was not in the least sorry. She disliked scenes, and was determined that she would not give way to tears. But when her father took out his pocket-book, and emptied the contents into her hands, reserving only enough to carry himself and Ray back to Crague,

she found it a hard matter to keep her resolution.

"I would rather not take it, father," she said with a sudden choking sensation. "I have fifty dollars of my own."

"Keep it, my daughter. You will want it all. When you need more, let me know; and may God bless you," he said, kissing her gravely and tenderly. Ray threw her arms about her neck.

"O Ban! Ban!" she cried, with a faint hope that Blanche would yet relent and go with them.

"Yes, dear, I know," said Blanche, kissing her; "but I must not keep you. There is the carriage." And Ray quietly took up her satchel, and followed her father down the steps.

The homeward journey was a somewhat dreary one for both of them, especially the ride from Cliff Haven to Crague, although Joshua Brent, who never lost an opportunity to be sociable with his passengers, made several attempts to draw them into conversation; and Mr. Braddington understood perfectly the feeling that prompted Ray to put her hand into his as they came in sight of Gullnest. Mrs. Braddington met them at the door with a flood of tears and a volley of questions.

Her husband hastened to explain.

"She is in good hands, my dear, and you must not be troubled about her," he added, in conclusion.

"Still, it would have been better for her to return."

"I don't see why you should say that," said his wife testily. "I am sure no one can blame the

poor child for wanting to get away from Crague. I should really feel glad that she is likely to have a chance to see something of the world, if it were not for the disgrace of her having to earn her own living."

"That can hardly be called a disgrace," said her husband gently. "If she is determined to remain, it will be much better for her to have some occupation."

"What absurd ideas you have, Jerome! What sort of society do you think she can enter if she is nothing but a music-teacher? I should think your uncle Braddington and aunt Rachel might have invited her to make her home with them."

"You forget, my dear, that uncle and aunt are too old and feeble to assume such a responsibility," said her husband, discreetly refraining from giving any hint of the invitation they had extended to Ray.

"Pray, what responsibility would it be? Blanche is old enough to take care of herself, and they might be proud to have such a niece to do the honors of the house. I am sure, if you had made the least suggestion in regard to it, they would have been delighted to have her come. That Mrs. Hedgway I met years ago at aunt Beverley's: she is a woman who hasn't a particle of style, and doesn't go into society at all."

"She looks like a sensible, motherly woman, and will, I am confident, be a good friend to Blanche," said Mr. Braddington. "She has promised to do all in her power to help her in obtaining scholars."

"Oh, my poor lamb!" cried Mrs. Braddington, with a burst of hysterical sobs.

"Laws, honey, don't take on so about de chile," said old Dido, coming in with the tea. "Miss Ban's all right. Jes' you take a good drink ob tea, and you'll feel better, missus. Dere ain't nuffin like a cup of ole golong to cure de 'sterics."

"Come, mother, have some tea and toast," said Ray, who had been kneeling before the open fire with a slice of bread on the toasting-fork.

"Don't talk to me of eating, child," said her mother, in a martyr's voice. "I'm not like some people. Trouble always takes away my appetite. If you and your father can eat when your poor sister is drudging for her daily bread, you are welcome to do so. My poor, poor darling!" And Mrs. Braddington buried her face in her handkerchief with a fresh shower of tears.

"Mrs. Hedgway has lovely china, mamma," said Ray, as she selected for her mother's use the only perfect cup that remained of the pretty china tea-set that had done service for over twenty years.

"I am thankful for that," said her mother, becoming interested at once. "It shows that she is a person of taste; and I am sure it will be a treat to your sister, she is so like me in her love of elegance. If there's any one thing that I abominate, it is cracked china."

Ray smiled, and smothered a sigh, as she filled for her father "the next best" cup, — one with a tiny nick in the rim, — reserving for her own use one

that was cracked and handle-less. She was conscious of a latent weakness in herself for delicate china and fine napery, and, indeed, for every sort of elegance; but all her life she had been learning to hold her taste for these things in abeyance. The general shabbiness of the house and furniture was no less a trial to her than to her mother, but she was too sunny and sensible to be depressed by it. So far as it was possible to remedy the shabbiness, she spared no pains; but where it was inevitable she bravely made the best of it. Indeed, the necessity for making the best of things had long ago impressed itself upon her as an important part of the philosophy of daily living. But this new trial had put her philosophy severely to the test: it was so hard to feel that there was any "best" about it; so hard to think of any way in which to cheer her father and mother. And her father and mother were not the only ones who needed cheering. Donald Keith and Gene Pencroft were alike disconsolate. Each of them had fancied himself Blanche's favored suitor, and each felt himself personally aggrieved by her abrupt departure.

"It is rather a cool way to treat her friends, to say the least," said Gene, with assumed indifference. Donald bit his lip and said nothing. He had loved her with all the strength of his ardent nature, and the evident pleasure with which she had received his attentions had satisfied him that his love was returned. He had even been content to leave the all-important question unasked, feeling that no

verbal assurance of her love was needed. Now he resolved to know the truth; and the day after Ray and her father returned, he despatched a letter to Blanche, begging her to explain it all. Then for days he haunted the post-office, but no answer came. At last, however, a letter came for Ray, and he took it upon himself to deliver it.

"Reckon she ain't much of a hand to write," said the postmaster with a shrewd grin; but Donald, with the letter in his hand, did not see the grin, and scarcely heard the comment. Just outside the door he met Ray; for she, too, followed up the mails with a lover's punctuality.

"For me?" she cried eagerly, as he held up the letter.

"Yes, for you," he said, with more disappointment in his face than he had any intention of showing.

"If you do not mind, I will read it now. I can't wait," she said, hastily tearing it open.

Donald did not mind. It was just what he wanted her to do. And as he walked at her side, nothing but a sense of honor, as fine and chivalrous as that of any Knight of the Round Table, kept him from looking down at the open page and reading it with her. It seemed to him that she made slow work of it; but at last she reached the end.

"You can read it if you wish," she said, in an unsteady voice, holding the letter toward him. "There is a message in it for you."

"Oh, thank you!" he said, seizing it as a starv-

ing man seizes a proffered loaf; but he did not see the pitying look in her eyes.

They had taken a "short cut" home, a path that led by the shore to the orchard gate.

"Let us sit down a moment: I can't read while I am walking," he said.

An inverted boat served for a seat; and while Donald read, Ray occupied herself in skipping stones, sending them flying over the water with a skilful hand. But she was not thinking of what she was doing: her thoughts were of Blanche, and of all that she was seeing and hearing. The letter was bright and newsy, and Ray had read it with girlish sympathy and appreciation. It was only the curt message, in postscript, to Donald that had troubled her. It seemed so heartless. "Tell Donald that I thank him for his kind letter, but I have too little leisure to correspond with him." She was glad that it came at the very end. She knew without turning her head when Donald reached it. She heard him draw a deep breath, and grind his teeth together; and the next moment the letter lay at her feet, and she saw him striding toward his boat, which he had left moored below the orchard. Her first impulse was to call him back, and say some comforting word. But the wind had caught up the letter, blowing it toward the water; and by the time she had regained possession of it, Donald had grasped his oars, and was pulling away as vigorously as if competing for a prize.

"Poor Donald!" she sighed, as she smoothed the

crumpled sheet. "Ban might have written more kindly."

But Donald, cleaving the water with the strokes of a young giant, did not look like one in need of pity. On and on, long after Ray had lost sight of it, sped the little boat, as if the rower had no thought of ever stopping or turning. At last, however, from sheer exhaustion, he dropped the oars, and threw himself at full length on the bottom of the boat. Lying thus, with his hands clasped under his head, and his eyes fixed on space, his gaze was suddenly intercepted by a huge hawk, directly over him, mounting with its prey. At the same instant he heard the report of a gun; and as he sprang up to see whence it came, the hawk whirled downward and fell dead at his feet. But prisoned in its strong talons, comparatively unharmed, lay a white dove, panting with fright. He was too practical to be superstitious. It was an every-day occurrence for a hawk to pounce upon any weaker bird that came in its way; and he never witnessed it without a desire to throttle the monster. In the present instance he simply rejoiced that one of the tribe had met the fate so richly merited; and gently freeing the little prisoner, he soothed and petted it until it gained courage to try its wings again.

"Some one made a splendid shot," he said, as he took up the dead hawk; and being a born naturalist, he began at once to make an autopsy. A man who has brains enough to become absorbed in any science is in no danger of committing suicide because

a woman slights him. Next to a controlling faith in God, the ability to become thus absorbed is one of the best safeguards against morbidness of every sort that man or woman can have. Keith was a zealous student of natural history. Every form of animal life interested him. He knew the ways of all the wild creatures that haunted the Crague woods, and of all the finny tribes that inhabited its waters. Even the most repulsive of bugs and spiders had a charm for him, and he made a study of every new variety that came in his way. His room was a miniature museum, an *omnium gatherum*, of winged creatures and creeping things. Bugs, butterflies, and moths, stilettoed with pins, decorated the walls; while every shelf and bracket was filled with stuffed birds and animals. Fortunately he had no one to interfere with his pursuits, his mother having long ago overcome even her repugnance to spiders for the sake of being his companion in study. Every thing that interested Donald interested his mother. In his childhood she had been his playmate, and later it was her strong intellect and loving heart that guided him in the ways of knowledge. And Mrs. Keith was not the woman to keep her boy in a flower-garden: the paths she chose for him were rugged and steep. Had she been a weak woman, there would have been danger of her making an idol of him, for he was just the sort of a son that a woman would naturally worship. Besides, his broad forehead and serious gray eyes were constant reminders of his father; his sinewiness of frame

and unusual length of limb were also characteristic of the Keiths : but his mouth was like hers, — firm, yet tender, — and the indentation in his large square chin was but an exaggeration of “ the fairy’s finger-print ” that dimpled her own. She was the daughter of a New-England minister, and had been educated for a teacher ; but at twenty she married Graham Keith, the captain of an ocean steamer, and after two or three voyages with him came to the Keith homestead on the Point, and had lived there ever since. There her three boys were born ; and thence the two elder, while Donald was still a child, had sailed away with their father, never again to come to land. It was the old story, told and retold in every seaport town : the ship went down, and all were lost. Donald alone was left to her ; and bracing herself against her sorrow, she devoted her life to the work of making a man of him.

Finding that he was fond of study, she had proposed sending him to college ; and he went through the preparatory course under Mr. Pencroft’s tuition, with the full expectation of entering with Eugene. But he had scarcely passed his examination, when the bank in which all their available funds were deposited suspended payment ; and, rather than incur debt, the young man abandoned the thought of a college training, and set himself diligently to improving their little farm. With characteristic persistency, however, he determined to go on with what he had begun ; and with Mr. Pencroft to direct him, he took up the college text-books in regular

order, and succeeded in mastering the entire curriculum.

But added years and increase of knowledge had made no barrier between him and his mother; and so far from trying to hide from her his feeling in regard to Blanche, he had long ago told her frankly all his hopes. It had troubled her at first, for, knowing Blanche, she could not help doubting the wisdom of his choice; but she was a woman of strong faith, and after that Blanche was never left out of her prayers. And Donald knew that she prayed for her. One evening, wanting a drink after being at work in his room till a late hour, he crept down-stairs in his slippers, supposing that his mother had long since retired: but as he passed her half-open door, he caught the sound of her voice; and, stopping involuntarily, he heard his own name, and coupled with it the tender prayer for Blanche. Forgetting his errand, he stole back to his room, awed by this new revelation of mother-love; and ever after, the remembrance of that prayer wrapped itself about Blanche like a white mantle.

It was late when he came home from rowing that evening, and supper was waiting for him; but the hawk, already prepared for filling, was a sufficient excuse for his tardiness, and Mrs. Keith listened to its tragic story with lively interest. But as soon as Donald grew silent, she saw that something was amiss; and presently as he sat gazing moodily into the fire, she took his face between her hands, and looked into his eyes.

"What has gone wrong with my boy?" she asked.

"Nothing, mother," he said evasively. But the next instant he lifted his head, and caught her hands in his. "Mother," he said, "don't you think, if a girl cared any thing for a friend, she would be willing to write to him?"

"That depends," said Mrs. Keith gravely. "There might be circumstances that would make it unwise."

"But not where they have known each other all their lives," he said impatiently. "She might at least find time to write to him once a month."

"Has she declined to write to you?" asked his mother, knowing for what he had been watching all these days.

"She says she will have no leisure," he said, with curling lip.

Mrs. Keith felt very much like smiling at this girlish excuse; and with her hand on his arm she said cheerfully, "It will all come right, my boy, if only you are content to wait."

"I would wait for her a thousand years," he cried, with the youthful confidence that feels youth to be immortal.

It was well, perhaps, that Donald did not know that at that very hour Gene Pencroft was reading, with a lover's rapture, a letter just received from Blanche. Happy in the belief that she belonged to himself, he had never entertained a jealous thought of Gene. Gene was his dearest friend, and he

would have been hurt to the quick if Blanche had treated him coolly. As for Gene, misled by this generosity, he found it an easy matter to persuade himself that Donald had nothing more than a brotherly regard for Blanche: so they had gone on, deceiving themselves and each other; and Blanche, pleased with their attentions, had not been anxious to have them undeceived. Now, however, she felt that every thing was changed. Donald's attentions in a place like Crague, where there was so lamentable a lack of gentlemen, were not to be despised: but Donald with his brown face and rustic manners was not the sort of lover that she would care to present to her city acquaintances; and if she consented to correspond with him, the rash boy might any day walk into Mrs. Hedgway's drawing-room, and lay claim to her.

It was different with Gene. He was two years older than Donald, and had been through college, and had a profession. Possibly he might be a great man some day; and at all events, with his fine face and easy manners, she could afford to introduce him anywhere as her friend. And when Gene's letter came asking the privilege of corresponding with her, she replied at once, giving both the desired permission and a cordial invitation for him to call at Mrs. Hedgway's whenever he was in town. It was almost more than he had dared to hope for, and with tender triumph he read and re-read the dainty note; but being naturally somewhat reticent, he made no mention of it to any one, not even to Ray.

Yet Ray was the trusted friend of both young men. Numerous were the boyish offerings that she had been commissioned to convey to Blanche, and numerous were the offerings that she herself had received from them. But there was a difference in the mode of presentation that even as a child she had recognized, and laughed at in her merry little heart. "Here is a bouquet for you, girlie," Gene would say, tossing a heterogeneous collection of flowers into her lap; but for Blanche he would bring a white rose, or a cluster of violets tied with blue ribbon. Donald would unceremoniously drop an apple into her work-basket, or rain a handful of wintergreen into her apron; but similar offerings for Blanche were temptingly laid in a shell-like basket of his own weaving.

"Silly boys! I don't believe Ban cares a straw for either of them," Ray would say to herself; and more than once, troubled with a fear that Blanche was trifling with them, she had ventured to remonstrate with her. But Blanche merely laughed, and called her a foolish child; and Ray, though content to be called a child for the sake of enjoying a child's freedom, would turn away puzzled and vexed, feeling, young as she was, that it was neither wise nor womanly for a girl to be encouraging two lovers at once. For this reason, she was glad that Donald was at last undeceived. Still it was impossible for her not to sympathize with him in his disappointment; and the contrast between his gloominess and Gene's exuberant spirit roused within her a feeling

of resentment toward the latter which she would have found hard to explain, and which sometimes led her to treat him with rather unsisterly coolness. But Gene was not in the least troubled about it. Happy in the belief that he was some day to belong to the family, he interested himself in all its members. For Ray, assuming an elder brother's privilege, he marked out a course of reading, supplying from the parsonage library the books that were lacking in the Braddington collection; and Ray, though pretending to rebel, found the prescription pleasant and wholesome. To Mr. Braddington he paid a deference spontaneous and tender, and to Mrs. Braddington's ceaseless complainings he listened with a respectful indulgence that made Ray forgive him for being happy at Donald's expense. Even in old Dido he seemed to feel that he had a copartnership interest, and always gave her a cordial word.

"Dere ain't no hypossom 'bout Marsa Gene," was Dido's verdict. "He show jus' what he am, de berry fust time ye look him in de eye. Marsa Donal' foine young gemmeman, too: he jus' as straightforred as a light'nin' rod, and nebber puts on no scollops ner flourishes, but he'm drefful down in de mouf sence Miss Ban goed away. Ef he done hab any one ob his seven senses, he'd know Miss Ray was wuff two ob Miss Ban any day, but young gemmemen when dey're in lub don't nebber hab no sense nohow."

This was said confidently to Silas Crane, a weather-

beaten, cadaverous-looking individual, who anywhere might have been taken for an own cousin of the illustrious Ichabod. He had originally been employed as gardener at Gullnest, but by degrees had come to be the family factotum, a position which he filled with plodding faithfulness.

“Miss Blanche was a fine-lookin’ craft,” he admitted in answer to Dido; “but she hadn’t ballast enough to stand a high wind, and for his part he should think Donald Keith could see with one eye shut that it wouldn’t be over-smooth sailin’ with her.” But Donald with both eyes open saw nothing of the kind. Blanche was to him the sweetest woman in the world; and the feeling that she belonged to him had grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength. In all his dreams of the future, she had been the “bright particular star” that led him on from height to height; for, boy-like, he had dreamed of fame and power and riches, believing that with her to help him all things were possible. And suddenly the star had dropped out of his life, and before he had fairly grown used to the darkness he found that his “lost Pleiad” was shining for another. This astronomical discovery was made in broad daylight, and without the help of a telescope. He chanced one afternoon to meet Gene at the post-office; and while waiting for the mail to be distributed, he saw the postmaster smilingly hand Gene a letter, — a dainty little affair, ornamented with one of the diamond-shaped motto seals then in vogue. At the moment he gave it no

thought; but shortly after, standing on the dock, whither they had strolled arm in arm on leaving the office, he accidentally caught sight of the address, Gene, in slipping the letter into his pocket, inadvertently turning it in such a way that he could not avoid seeing it. There are times in every man's life when temptation rushes upon him like a midnight assassin, demanding instant surrender. Such a time had come to Donald Keith. For a second the fierce desire to pitch Gene headlong from the dock all but mastered him. What right had Gene to be hearing from her when not a word was vouchsafed to him? He had loved them both, and both had deceived him. While the mad impulse was still uppermost, a boy who had been playing near them suddenly lost his balance, and fell shrieking into the water. Gene instantly plunged in after him; and so abrupt was his disappearance, that to Donald, who in his pre-occupied state of mind had scarcely noticed the child, it seemed as if he had really done the murderous deed that was in his heart. "Wretch!" he exclaimed, with a horrified recoil from himself; and, thinking only of rescuing Gene, he was about to spring in when Gene shouted to him to stop.

"I have him! Stay where you are, and catch him when I hand him up," he called with chattering teeth. And Donald meekly obeyed; but he tossed the boy aside unceremoniously, and threw both arms about Gene, regardless of his dripping clothes, and gave him a bear-like embrace.

"That's a good way to bring a fellow to," sput-

tered Gene; "but you would better hug the boy. He is nearer drowned than I am. Hi! but that water is cold! The middle of November isn't the best time in the year for a salt-water bath. — Run home to your mother, Tommy, and have on some dry clothes, or you'll take your death o' cold."

"And I advise you to do the same," said Donald, taking him by the arm and walking him off; nor would he leave him on reaching the parsonage until he had given him a rubbing that put them both into a glow, for he could not rid himself of the feeling that he was answerable for any ill that might result to Gene from his unseasonable bath. Still he could not reconcile himself to the fact of Gene's seeming usurpation. Had Blanche chosen to write to both of them, not a jealous thought would have crossed his mind; but feeling that she had hitherto given him all the encouragement that any reasonable lover could ask, this sudden partiality to Gene filled him with a sense of ill desert. Bitter as he felt toward Blanche, however, he still kept up his intimacy with the family, partly from force of habit, and partly because he found Ray's cheerful presence an excellent antidote for his moodiness. It made no light tax on Ray's sympathy, but she was too sensible to put her sympathy into words. Had he shown any disposition to be sentimental about his trouble, she would have had no patience with him; but Donald had a wholesome detestation of egotistical prating, and would sooner have cut off his right hand than have paraded his disappoint-

ment, even to Ray. Indeed, the fact that Blanche had sent her answer through her instead of writing to him individually had added seriously to his grievance; not so much because his pride was hurt, as because he knew that Ray would take up the burden as her own, and he felt that she already had burdens enough to carry. So his trouble was "a sealed book." This silent endurance touched Ray, and in her own way she managed to deal him many a drop of balm.

"Here is a letter from Ban, if you care to read it," she would say carelessly; and Donald would pick up the letter with the air of one to whom it was a matter of the utmost indifference whether he read it or not, and the next instant be unconscious of Ray's presence. Whereupon Ray, smiling to herself at the abrupt transition, would slip away and leave him alone until he had time to read every line twice over. Sometimes on these occasions, she would come back with the most innocent look imaginable, bringing a new entomological specimen for him to examine; and Donald, after a critical inspection of it, would find to his disgust that, like the "Cardiff giant," it was a made-up affair, — a non-descript creature "that never was on sea or land," the different parts, having no natural affinity, being held together with mucilage. But notwithstanding these practical jokes, she evinced so genuine an interest in his favorite study, that he began a systematic course of instruction, and seldom came to the house without bringing some bird or insect to

add to her collection. Even taxidermy was included in the course, and she soon became so expert as to be able to do her own filling and mounting.

"For pity's sake, child, do tell me what you are going to do with that!" asked Mrs. Braddington, finding her chopping tow one evening.

"That's stuffing, mother, for one of my birds," laughed Ray, shaking out a handful of filling.

"Well, I must say I don't think you have chosen a very ladylike accomplishment," said her mother peevishly. "I don't see where in the world you ever got such strange tastes from, child, — certainly not from me."

"But Donald does all the rough part, mother," said Ray. "I have only the fancy work to do."

"Donald!" said her mother contemptuously. "I think if I were a young man I would find some better occupation. What will he ever amount to, I'd like to know? I am glad your sister had the good sense to turn him the cold shoulder. He is too presuming altogether. If you are not careful, he will be proposing to you next."

Ray broke into a merry laugh.

"Don't be troubled about Donald, mother: he is wedded to science." And gathering up her materials, she made her escape to the library.

"Science, indeed!" said Mrs. Braddington, as the door closed after her: "much good it will do him here. If he had any spirit, he would never stay in a place like this."

Yet disparagingly as she always spoke of him,

had he left Crague few would have missed him more ; for Donald, knowing that though lacking a taste for natural history, she had a keen appreciation of roast duck and broiled quail, never had a successful day's shooting without bringing her an offering from his game-bag. But while she graciously accepted these gifts, and admitted that Donald was very civil and obliging, she would have scorned him as a suitor for either of her daughters : for Donald was a Crague man, and she was not to be persuaded that any good could come out of Crague ; neither was she to be persuaded that any young man or young woman could be fitted there to fill a worthy place in society. Perhaps it did not occur to her, that more than one of the Lord's prophets have been trained in the wilderness.

It is Ruskin, I think, who says, in speaking of the Campanile of Giotto : " Not within the walls of Florence, but among the far-away fields of her lilies, was the child trained who was to raise that headstone of beauty above the towers of watch and war ; " and many another of God's cathedral-builders has learned in solitary places, by the seashore and on the mountain-tops, in green meadows and under starry skies, of tree and flower and singing bird, of purling brooks and raging cataracts, the wisdom that has become the ground-work of a lofty and noble life. The Lord knows what he is doing when he sets his Moses and his David to tending flocks ; when he puts his John the Baptist, his Agassiz, his Hugh Miller, in the wilderness, with

himself for teacher and nature for a text-book ; and just as wisely, just as lovingly, he directs the steps of the least of his "minor prophets." Yet, judged relatively, as the Lord judges, who shall say who are least and who are greatest of the world's workers? Is not every true thinker the Lord's messenger, preparing the way and making the paths straight for other feet?

Donald was as yet scarcely more than a boy, but already he had laid a solid foundation on which to build in after days. Knowing nothing of Darwinian theories, he had unconsciously obeyed his "most persistent instinct," and had been safe in doing so, simply because the instinct was a pure and manly one, inherited from a clean-hearted, freedom-loving ancestry, — an instinct that made him love fields and woods and breezy hill-tops, and the great sea best of all. His trouble, the first real trouble he had ever known, only deepened this "persistent instinct," and led him oftener than ever to spend whole days in the wildest of nature's haunts.

One evening in the early spring, Gene called at Gullnest to ask Rachel to take a row with him on the bay ; but it chanced to be prayer-meeting night.

"I am afraid it will make us late," she said.

"Oh! I'll see that you are there in time," said Gene. "We have a full half-hour to spare, and we will land at our dock, and join father and Dell."

As they were about taking the boat, Donald came up, fresh from an after-supper tramp.

"Just in time!" cried Gene. "Jump in and have a row."

Donald, not in the least averse to this sort of pastime, promptly accepted the invitation; but when he found that Gene and Ray were on their way to prayer-meeting, he asked to be put ashore.

"Why can't you go with us?" said Ray persuasively. "Come, we haven't seen you at prayer-meeting for months."

"No: I am not in prayer-meeting trim to-night, outside nor in," said Donald; "besides, they are stupid affairs usually."

"Come with us, and see if they haven't improved since you were there last," said Rachel. "Never mind your boots. We'll take a back seat."

And thus entreated, Donald landed with them at the parsonage dock, and accompanied them to the church.

It must be admitted, that, as a rule, there is nothing artistic about a prayer-meeting. The leaders are prone to forget the Pythagorean precept, "Unless you have something better than silence to offer, be silent," and the prayers are more than likely to be stereotyped and ungrammatical; while, as for the singing, the utter disregard of time and tune on the part of many of those who join in it make it torture to sensitive ears. And the Crague prayer-meeting was not an exception. But Ray, though she had a true ear and a quick perception of the ludicrous, was not inclined to be either critical or fastidious. It would have been pleasanter, of course, if

old Mrs. Crosson could have sung without "flattering," and if Elder Wyman's nasal twang could have been omitted; but she felt that these primitive worshippers were making "melody in their hearts to the Lord." Even when Jonah Crimble, who was famous for his redundant use of adjectives, began his prayer with the words, "O thou orbiquitous Jehovah," she tried not to smile, feeling sure that the heavenly interpreter would not miss the old man's reverent meaning. They were the Lord's people, and because the Lord himself was with them she felt it was good to be there. If ever she went away unblest, she knew that there was no one but herself to blame.

But on that particular night her devotional thoughts were scattered in an unexpected way. Mr. Pencroft had gone through with the opening exercises; Jonah Crimble had made his usual prayer, introducing all the long words in his vocabulary; and Ray, in notes as sweet and clear as a thrush's, had followed with

"My faith looks up to thee," —

for in the Crague prayer-meeting every "sister" had the right to start a hymn, and even to speak and pray, if she felt disposed to do so, — and the others joining her, the quartet of young voices, Gene's fine tenor and Donald's bass, together with Della's alto, effectually drowned Elder Wyman's nasal discords and Mrs. Crosson's quavers; and the moment the hymn was ended, Deacon Munn arose

to pray. In the midst of the prayer, just after one of Jonah Crimble's deep responses, — nothing ever kept Jonah from responding, — Ray was startled by a hoarse croak close at her ear; and, raising her head, she beheld, seated on the book-ledge, a huge frog staring at her with beady eyes, apparently as much at home as if perched on the brink of his native marsh. Such an apparition just then and there was so suggestive of the being that once

“Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,”

that Ray felt a chill creep over her. But before there was time for a second thought the creature, evidently bent on a nearer acquaintance, vaulted into her lap. Girl-like, she came near screaming; then, conquering herself, she quietly put her handkerchief over the intruder, and thrust him into her pocket; but the remainder of the service was a blank to her. She could think of nothing but her strange captive, not daring to loosen her hold upon him for an instant. Now and then she could hear him faintly piping: but, muffled as he was, the sounds were inaudible to the others; and Donald, at the farther end of the seat, had no presentiment of the lecture Ray was planning for his benefit. She knew just how it had happened: Donald had been making a raid on the frog-pond at the time he joined them, and his prisoner, tired of his close quarters, had come up to view his surroundings. It was not the first time that she had seen living creatures evolved from the depths of Donald's coat-pocket, but never before

had it happened so inopportunately ; and she mentally registered a resolve never to go anywhere with him again without first making him turn his pockets inside out. At last, to her great relief, Mr. Pencroft gave out the closing hymn ; and still in terror lest her enemy should make his voice heard, she allowed her own voice its fullest scope.

"I wish you would always sing like that," said Gene, the moment the benediction was pronounced.

But Ray, shaking with laughter, hastened out without trusting herself to speak.

"What ails you, Ray?" inquired Della, amazed at her unusual levity. But she was not yet able to give an intelligible answer.

"Do hear the frogs!" said Gene, who was walking ahead with Donald: "they seem to be holding a concert down on the marsh."

"That reminds me!" exclaimed Donald, clapping a hand over his coat-pocket: "I caught a splendid specimen of the *rana palustris* to-night. Where is the creature?" And both hands went into the depths of his coat-tails. "I declare, if he hasn't given me the slip! That's what comes of going to prayer-meeting when I ought to be attending to business."

"See rather the good results of going to prayer-meeting," said Rachel, with suddenly assumed gravity, as she produced her handkerchief, and displayed the half-smothered monster. "If you had been anywhere else, you would never have laid eyes on your *rana palustris* again."

"How under the sun did it get into your possession?" asked Donald, as he carefully restored it to his own pocket. And none of them would be satisfied until Ray had explained.

"I don't see how you managed to keep quiet," said Della. "I should have screamed outright."

"There came a great spider,
And sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away," —

quoted Gene, evidently for Della's benefit.

"It would take something more than a spider to frighten Ray," said Donald, who had listened to her amusing description with intense enjoyment.

"It was not easy to keep quiet, I can assure you; and the next time you go to prayer-meeting, Donald Keith, I advise you to empty your pockets beforehand," said Rachel, as she bade them good-night.

"'Clar for it, Marsa Donal' oughter lib down in Egypt, whar de swom ob frogs kim up out ob de bul-rushes for to soften Fayrower's heart," commented old Dido the next morning, as, standing behind Ray's chair at breakfast, she shook her sides over the account of the evening's adventure. "Reckon he done git a pocketful ob frogs down dar widout much wadin'."

"It is a ridiculous habit that that young man is falling into," said Mrs. Braddington peevishly. "I am always expecting to see some dreadful creature crawling over him."

But Mr. Braddington wiped his eyes, and, hastily swallowing his coffee, escaped to the library to finish his laugh.

"Here is a new piece of music, girlie," he said soberly, a few hours later, "written expressly for you."

"What is it?" asked Ray with eagerness, as she seated herself at the piano.

"Play it and see," he said, putting the sheet before her.

"O papa Braddington, I know!" she cried, at the end of the first bar; "it is the 'Frogs' Chorus!'" And then her fingers went flying over the keys, while her father leaned back and laughed till the tears came again.

"That is to reward you for being a brave little girl," he said, when after playing it through twice she danced across the room and seated herself on his knee.

"It is the best joke of the season, papa," she said, patting his cheeks. And whenever other devices failed to make Donald smile, she played him the "Frogs' Chorus."

CHAPTER V.

SMOOTH SAILING.

DURING the winter, brief letters from Blanche had come at irregular intervals. She had made a few pleasant acquaintances, she wrote, and Mrs. Hedgway had secured several scholars for her. Occasionally she spoke of attending a concert or a lecture; but, at best, they were very unsatisfactory glimpses that she gave them of her new life.

"What a child she is!" Mrs. Braddington would exclaim, almost angrily. "Why doesn't she tell us more of what she is doing? And why in the world doesn't she say who it is that takes her out? She might at least mention the name. A name often gives one an idea of what a person is. And she doesn't say a word about her dresses. Poor child! I dare say she is still wearing the same old things she took away with her. I do wish she would be a little more explicit."

This at least was the usual tenor of her comments; yet if Mr. Braddington chanced inadvertently to regret the brevity and infrequency of the letters, she silenced him at once by asking sharply, "what more could be expected when the dear girl was working day and night to earn her living."

Her letters to Pencroft were coquettish and non-committal, but he was in no wise discouraged. Even the fact that his weekly budget of three closely written sheets of "commercial note" seldom drew from her more than two pages in reply did not at first daunt him. The young student was but just coming to a knowledge of himself, and to an appreciation of the joys of intellectual life; and in his letters he had poured out with youthful egotism his hopes and aspirations, his opinions of books and authors and of the world in general, and had philosophized and moralized in the happy belief that she would be interested in knowing all his thoughts. But while her brief replies disappointed him, her simple statement that she was too busy to give much attention to writing made him doubly grateful to her for writing at all; and in the fear of encroaching on her time, he gradually reduced his letters to mere bulletins of Crague news. To Blanche it was a welcome change: for though she had thoroughly appreciated the delicate compliment he paid her in taking it for granted that she had a taste for something better than village gossip, there was no denying that the lengthier letters had bored her: she had even skipped whole pages when the subject proved too deep for her; and some of them were still lying unread, waiting her convenience. But she was too much of a coquette to be willing to lose her power over him; and, had she suspected that the change in the letters omened a similar change in the writer, she would have been seriously disturbed. Gene him-

self did not suspect it : but it is not possible to give the highest and best love to one from whom we are compelled to withhold all that is best in ourselves ; and just in proportion as he withdrew himself from his letters, his inmost love was withdrawing itself from her to whom they were addressed. Yet when one morning, his father remarked that it would be necessary for one of them to go to town the next day to attend to certain business matters, he offered his services with alacrity, secretly rejoiced that his father had no desire to take the journey.

There was not time to write to announce his visit, and consequently when he was ushered into Mrs. Hedgway's drawing-room, Blanche was somewhat startled. Doubtless his unexpected arrival, together with the presence of a music-scholar, should have accounted for her giving him only the tips of her fingers, and calling him " Mr. Pencroft ; " but lovers are not given to reasoning with common-sense on such occasions. For two days he had been picturing to himself the meeting, and he was not prepared for a reception like this. It was like opening the door on a winter's night, eager with the expectation of finding a bright fire on the hearth, and finding, instead, a rush of cold air greeting him. But the stiffness, from whatever cause it came, wore off by the time they had chatted fifteen minutes ; and in the evening they went to hear Nilsson, with Mrs. Hedgway as chaperone, and Blanche was her sweetest self, in every way charming.

" It was a pleasure so unexpected," she said.

But whether the pleasure was due to Gene's presence, together with Nilsson's wondrous singing, or to the consciousness that all eyes were paying tribute to her own beauty, was a question which a close observer would not have found it hard to answer. Gene did not ask the question.

"She is more beautiful than ever," he said to himself, after his farewell call the following day; "and yet — and yet" — He did not complete the sentence even in thought, but in his inmost heart there was a sore sense of something lacking; and though the correspondence went on as before, he no longer evinced any impatience to win from her a promise of marriage. Blanche, however, flattering herself that the slightest word of encouragement would call forth a fresh declaration, was not in the least disturbed by this state of affairs; and, had Pencroft been able to offer her a home on Fifth Avenue, the encouraging word would not have been delayed. But she had no intention of marrying any one who would compel her to live in Crague. Even teaching music was preferable to that.

Mrs. Hedgway, in obtaining scholars for her, had stipulated that they were to come to the house for their lessons, kindly putting her own piano at her service.

"It is not quite prudent for a young girl who is an entire stranger in the city to go about giving lessons," she said; "and not particularly pleasant either, I think."

Blanche was very well satisfied with the arrange-

ment, and for a time adhered to it strictly. But it chanced that a cousin of Mrs. Hedgway's, a Miss Ross, who had been a music-teacher for years, being obliged to give up her class on account of failing health, recommended one of her younger pupils to her, — a little girl of eleven.

"But she will prefer to have her lessons at her home," said the lady, "for she is delicate, and seldom goes out except to ride."

"Then it will be better for Blanche not to take her," said Mrs. Hedgway decidedly.

"But it seems to me worth while to make this case an exception," urged Miss Ross. "She is an only child, and has no mother. Her father, who is a music-publisher, is away all day at business, and there is not the slightest impropriety in Miss Brad-dington's going to the house. I have been teaching there for a year, and have not once laid eyes on him. He is wealthy, and she can name her own price."

"There may be no impropriety in it," said Mrs. Hedgway apprehensively; "still, I think it would be much better to have the child come here."

"Oh! I dare say she would come if you insist on it," said Miss Ross, as she took leave.

"Then, I should insist on it, by all means," said Mrs. Hedgway to Blanche.

"Why, dear Mrs. Hedgway, any one would think there was a wolf standing at every corner ready to devour me," said Blanche banteringly. "I am not a little Red Riding Hood. I fancy I should know a

wolf when I saw one, even if he wore my grandmother's cap."

"I hope so, dear; still, it is better to keep out of the wolf's way," said her motherly friend.

But Blanche made light of her fears, and, saying that she would take all the responsibility in the case, hastened up-stairs to put on her walking-dress. When she came down, however, she found Mrs. Hedgway ready to go with her.

"I thought you might like company," said the lady; and, looking up at the beautiful face, she could not help wishing that the girl were safe in her father's house.

"Thank you. You are very kind," said Blanche, with one of her brightest smiles. But she would have been quite as well pleased, had she been permitted to go alone.

They had but three or four blocks to walk, and had no difficulty in finding the house; a handsome brown-stone mansion in a fashionable street. A plain elderly woman received them; and, having learned their errand, she summoned her young mistress. A letter of introduction from Miss Ross explained their errand; and, as the housekeeper had been authorized to engage any one whom Miss Ross should recommend, the negotiations were soon completed. Mrs. Hedgway ventured to say that Miss Braddington was in the habit of having her scholars come to her house to receive their lessons; but before either little Bessie or the housekeeper could answer her, Blanche interposed, saying that if Miss

Bessie preferred to take her lesson at home, she would not ask her to make any change: and that settled it.

The lessons began the next day. Bessie, a soft-eyed, delicate-looking child, was passionately fond of music; and she had already attained such proficiency that Blanche found it no drudgery to teach her. She was equally fond of beauty, and seemed never to tire of watching her beautiful young teacher. The two were soon warm friends, and the semi-weekly visit was a mutual pleasure.

"Do you always live alone in this great house, Bessie, with no one but the servants?" Blanche asked, one day, when at the close of the lesson the child threw herself into her arms with a mute appeal for love and sympathy.

"I have papa," she said; "but he is at home only evenings, and the days are so long and so lonely!"

"Poor little girl!" said Blanche: "papa ought to get some one to be a companion for you."

"I want mamma. There's no one in the world like my own mamma," said the child, with quivering lips.

But this was a sorrow into which Blanche could not enter, and for which she had no word of comfort; and with a kiss she took her leave, meditating, as she went, on the unknown papa, and wondering if it would ever be her good fortune to meet him.

The summer was advancing, and one morning Mrs. Hedgway informed her that she had decided

to close her house for a few weeks, and pay a visit to Mrs. Beverley. Ostensibly this decision was made for the purpose of being out of town during dog-days; but in reality it was a bit of fine strategy on Mrs. Hedgway's part, that Blanche might have no excuse for not going home. Blanche was disappointed. The country had no charm for her, even in midsummer — at least, Crague had none; but as there was no alternative, she packed her trunk, and accompanied Mrs. Hedgway to Cliff Haven. Aunt Beverley gave her a warm welcome, and, without a word of reference to the abrupt manner in which she had ended her previous visit, invited her to stay till the following week. Ready always to make the most of opportunities of this sort, Blanche complacently accepted the invitation, and, stretching it to its utmost limit, remained until the next Saturday afternoon. Had Aunt Beverley urged it, she would willingly have remained a month; for Cliff Haven was crowded with summer boarders, and before she had been there three days she was conscious that her beauty was attracting attention. She knew perfectly well, when she passed down the aisle to aunt Beverley's pew on Sunday morning, that admiring eyes were following her; and in her walks on the beach she overheard more than once the question, "Who is she?" whispered from group to group. One day something happened. She was standing with several others, watching the waves roll in, when a huge breaker came dashing up the shore, in the unexpected way characteristic of breakers, taking

every one unawares; and as she sprang back to escape it, she tripped on one of the bath-ropes, and would have fallen but for the timely help of a masculine hand.

"Oh, thank you!" she cried half-breathlessly; and looking up she met the admiring gaze of a pair of brilliant eyes, and comprehended in one swift glance that the owner bore the exterior of a gentleman, that his face was handsome, his necktie faultless, and his entire costume in the latest style.

"It was very careless in me, but it was all owing to the rope," she said, as she regained her footing.

"Then I am the rope's debtor," he answered smilingly.

At that moment, to her extreme annoyance, aunt Beverley, who with Mrs. Hedgway had been seated under an awning, called to her that it was time to go.

"I am coming," she replied, with a graceful little bow to her new acquaintance; and the man lifted his hat, and watched her till she reached her friends. It was a trivial occurrence, yet Blanche could not help wishing that it had happened earlier, that there might have been a chance of their meeting again; for it was Friday, and her last day at the beach. If aunt Beverley would only ask her to stay another week! But aunt Beverley did not see fit to extend the invitation.

Meanwhile at Crague the family had been in a state of anxious expectancy. Blanche had written to them before leaving town, that she was about to

make them a visit ; and Ray, half wild with joy, had hastened to put her room in readiness, and had not once failed to lay a plate for her at the tea-table, thinking that she might come any day.

“Laws, honey, what’s de use?” said old Dido. “Ef Miss Ban’s habbin’ a good time, she ain’t a-gwine to flustercate herself about gittin’ home. Time enough to sot a plate fo’ her when yo’ sees her walkin’ in.” But Ray kept the vacant place ready all the same.

“If she doesn’t come to-night, I shall know that something serious is the matter,” said Mrs. Braddington on Friday ; a remark that she had reiterated every day that week. “She must be sick, or she would certainly writé. There’s no telling. The weather is so warm, and there has been one case of cholera already. Oh, my poor darling!” And all Ray’s efforts to cheer her were met with tears and reproaches.

Mr. Braddington, too, was beginning to grow uneasy, and every afternoon found him at the window watching the Cliff Haven road : while as for the two young men, Gene Pencroft, ever since hearing that she was coming, had daily intercepted the stage a mile or more from the village, for a survey of the passengers ; and Donald was always loitering in the neighborhood at the time of its arrival. To all of them this prolonged uncertainty was growing intolerable ; and when on Friday the stage again rattled past without stopping, Mr. Braddington expressed his determination to go the next day to Cliff Haven

to telegraph to the city. But fifteen minutes later Gene walked in with a letter for Rachel.

"She is coming to-morrow!" cried the girl, running her eye over the page. "She left New York last Wednesday, and has been staying with aunt Beverley ever since."

"Dear child! I dare say she was completely worn out, and was obliged to stop to rest," said Mrs. Braddington.

And if it occurred to any of them, that the "dear child" might at least have sent a line telling them of her plans, no one put it into words. They were too happy in knowing that she was already within twenty miles of home to think of finding fault. "To-morrow" was the refrain of all their thoughts. Mrs. Braddington could talk of nothing else, and fretted and fidgeted to an extent that made it a hard matter for Ray to possess her soul in patience.

"But it will all be right to-morrow," she said to herself, feeling confident that Blanche's coming would cause her mother to forget for the time every annoyance; and with this comforting reflection she went about trying to devise ways to brighten up the house.

"A pusson'd tink dat Queen Victorey was gwine fo' to come, by de transpo'tations dey makes ober dat dar chile," said old Dido. "Dar's Miss Ray done gone and bought w'ite sugah fo' cake when we hain't hab nuffin but brown Hosanna and N'Orleans 'lasses in de house dese six mumfs, 'cept a little loaf sugah fo' de Misses' tea; and I reckon

wat am good enough fo' de rest ob us am good enough fo' Miss Ban. Dis yere family can't stan' no sich extrabagances." Yet the faithful old creature, knowing Blanche's fondness for waffles, had the waffle-irons heating when the stage drove up, while a bountiful quantity of the condemned sugar, spiced with cinnamon, was in readiness to be sprinkled over the cakes.

"Yo' sees I hain't fo'got yo', honey. I knowed dar warn't nuffin in de world 'd taste so nat'ral and homesome-like as dem dar wuffles," she said; for Blanche, greeted with the fragrance from the kitchen, had cried "Waffles!" the moment she entered the house. And some way, in the minds of all of them, waffles were ever after associated with that happy evening when Blanche sat again in her old place at the table, queenly and radiant.

Gene, meeting the stage that afternoon, had seen her face at the window, and, stopping the driver, had sprung in, congratulating himself on being the first to welcome her. To Donald, hiding on a wooded hill-top not far away, it was the signal that she had come; and, taking a nearer way than the public road, he had reached the great willow at the corner of the orchard in time to see Gene help her from the stage, and had watched with hungry eyes the meeting with Ray and her father and mother, and then had turned with folded arms, and walked swiftly down to the shore where his boat was moored, the tempest in his soul in miserable contrast with the still beauty of the summer evening.

CHAPTER VI.

"SALLY."

FOR a few days Blanche really enjoyed the novelty of being at home, of being petted and indulged and cared for; but the home itself seemed to her more old-fashioned and forlorn than ever, and Crague and its people more despicable.

"How can you stand it?" she said to Ray. "I should die, I am sure, if I had to stay here."

"But you are going to stay!" cried Ray in alarm. "O Ban! you surely don't mean to leave us again?"

"Indeed I do," said Blanche. "Why, my dear child, what folly it would be for me to give up my class when I am so well started! It would be giving up all that I have gained. I should like it better, of course, if we could all be together; but I never can consent to live in Crague again, never!" And the emphasis she laid on the last word effectually ended the discussion. Still, Ray could not abandon the hope that she might, after all, be induced to remain; and from morning till night she exerted herself to make her forget the attractions of the city. In this her father zealously co-operated, devoting

every spare moment to Blanche's entertainment. Even Mrs. Braddington put forth an effort to be cheerful. But when fretfulness has become chronic, it is no easy matter to conquer it; and her sentences, however brightly begun, usually ended in lamentations. She could not bear the thought of being again separated from her darling; but prouder than ever of her beauty, and ambitious to see her make a brilliant marriage, she was continually inveighing against the fate that bound them to Crague.

"Even Cliff Haven," she declared, "would be an improvement on this contemptible little village; for the city people like to come to Cliff Haven, and through the summer there is always something going on. If your father could only be persuaded to sell the old place, and take a house there, we could have a taste of society at least once a year."

"But who would buy it, mamma?" asked Ray, her heart sinking at the thought of seeing Gullnest pass into other hands. "There has scarcely been a house bought or sold in Crague for the last five years."

"Of course not," said her mother querulously: "nobody wants to buy a house in such a forsaken corner of the world as this, so there is nothing for us to do but to stay here till we die."

Remarks of this description served only to strengthen Blanche in her determination to go back. She could not understand Ray's cheerful adaptation of herself to circumstances. As for her father and mother, she fancied — reasoning, as the young are

apt to reason, that the best of life is over at middle age — that they were as well off here as they would be anywhere ; but she pitied Ray.

"It is so utterly monotonous, this sort of life," she reiterated ; "the same old faces to look at, and the same routine to go through with three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. I would as soon be shut up in a nunnery as to live so out of the world."

But, however cloister-like Crague might be, Ray showed no disposition to make a nun of herself. She took a keen interest in the affairs of the day, in literature and art and science, and knew far more of what was really going on in the world than Blanche herself. Why she should feel so lively an interest in matters in which she could have no part, Blanche could not understand. Neither could she understand Ray's interest in every poor creature who laid claim to her sympathy. She could be affable and generous herself, when there was due occasion : but Ray's kindnesses were spontaneous ; she could no more help being pitiful and sympathetic where pity and sympathy were needed, than the grass can help being cool and restful to tired feet and eyes.

One morning a sorrowful-looking woman, with a baby in her arms, came to the door and asked to see "Miss Rachel." Ray was at the piano, practising a difficult composition ; and Blanche begged her to send word to the woman that she was engaged.

"Why, it is poor Mrs. Coleman, Ban," she said.

"She lost her husband last spring, and has no one in the world to care for her. — Tell her to come right in, Dido." And turning from the piano she drew an easy-chair to the window for her visitor, heated with a long walk in the July sunshine, and gave her a fan, and hunted up a picture-book for the baby.

"Poor little thing! he's been ailin'-like ever since his father died," said the mother with a sigh. "I begin to be afeard that he's goin' to be took from me too."

"Oh, no!" said Ray brightly. "He isn't going to die. He is a sturdy little fellow, Mrs. Coleman, in spite of his pale cheeks. I dare say he will live to be a man, and take care of you in your old age."

"If he only grows to be a good man like his pa, Miss Ray, that's all I'll ask," said the woman, wiping away a tear. "There ain't many men like he was; and I tried to be a good wife to him, Miss Ray, but I see now that I might have been carefuller to please him sometimes. We're always seein' sech things after it's too late. For one thing, Joe was dreadful fond of onions, and always wanted 'em in his hash; but I never hankered after onions myself, and half the time I'd disremember to put 'em in. He never said much, — he wasn't no hand to find fault, Joe wasn't, — but I know he missed 'em, and I can't forgive myself now for bein' so careless. There ain't much I have to take myself up for, but I might jest as well as not have put onions in his hash more."

"He wouldn't want you to be troubled about that

now," Ray answered with a gentle gravity that gave no hint of the smile that lay back of it; though she knew that Blanche, at the other end of the room, was shaking with amusement. "I dare say he has forgotten all about it before this, and only remembers what a good, true wife you were."

"It's sech a comfort to talk to you, Miss Ray!" said her visitor, looking up with a brightening face: "it's jest like warm fur to any body that's half froze. I hope you won't never be left a lone widder, Miss Ray; but if you should, I hope the Lord'll send somebody to comfort you the same way that you comfort other folks."

"Thank you, Mrs. Coleman. I am sure he will," responded Ray; and at that moment the baby caught sight of a vase of flowers on the mantel, and put out his hands, crying, "Pitty! pitty!"

"That jest puts me in mind of what I came for," said the mother, as Ray broke off a rose for the child. "I wanted to ask you if you'd be kind enough jest to give me a few flower-seeds in the fall to plant on the grave. He was dreadful fond of posies, Joe was; and I thought maybe it'd please him like to see some growin' there."

"You shall have all you want," said Ray; and presently the woman took up her baby from the floor, where it sat cooing over its treasures, and went away rested and comforted.

"How in the world can you talk to such people, Ray?" exclaimed Blanche, the moment the door closed behind her: "it is a sheer waste of time."

Here is half an hour lost from your music, and all for a wretched old woman and her whining baby."

"Perhaps if we could put ourselves in her place it wouldn't seem a waste of time," said Ray; and going back to the piano, she began to practise with such energy that it was impossible for Blanche to make herself heard.

It was while Blanche was at home, that it was rumored that there was trouble in Captain Decker's family. It had just come to light, that Sally, some three or four months before, had been secretly married to a somewhat disreputable young sailor. The young man had formerly been employed on one of her father's fishing-boats, but of late he had been working on a steamer; and one morning the news came to Crague, that in a recent explosion he had been instantly killed. Overwhelmed by the tidings, Sally had confessed her marriage; and her father in his anger, having long ago forbidden her to speak to the fellow, was threatening to turn her out of the house.

Ray heard of it one afternoon at the sewing-society. It chanced to meet that day at Mrs. Williams's, next door to Capt. Decker's; and Sally was the chief topic of conversation. Ray listened in amazement; and in her horror of every thing clandestine it seemed as if a yawning chasm had suddenly opened between herself and Sally, separating them so widely that it would never be possible for them to touch each other's hands again. But her love for the playmate of her childhood rose up and

pleaded for her. She remembered what a generous, affectionate little creature Sally had always been, ready at any time to share her treasures with a friend; she had a bead-necklace at home that Sally had given her, and a box of foreign shells that she had insisted on her taking because she had chanced to admire them: and blinding tears gathered beneath her downcast lashes, and dropped one by one on the apron she was making for the missionary box.

"Poor Sally! Perhaps if she had had a mother, it might have been different," said little Mrs. Pencroft pityingly.

"That's very true," chimed in Mrs. Williams; "for we all know what aunt Judith is, an' the cap'n off cruisin' half the time. Still," shaking her head solemnly, "Sally's seventeen, an' at that age a girl oughtn't to need much motherin'." Mrs. Williams had no daughters.

"A girl needs mothering much longer than we are apt to think her in need of it," said Mrs. Pencroft quickly; "especially a warm-hearted, impulsive girl like Sally."

Mrs. Elder Wyman shrugged her shoulders.

"I should think a minister's wife'd be the last one to make excuses for her," she remarked primly, without seeming to address any one in particular.

"No excuse is possible, Mrs. Wyman," said Mrs. Pencroft sadly; "but the duty of exercising charity is none the less binding." But her gentle protest was lost in the deepening buzz of voices.

The afternoon was sultry; and some of the ladies,

finding the parlor uncomfortable, took their work out of doors, and, seating themselves in little groups on the porch and under the trees, went on with the absorbing topic, forgetting that the box-hedge that separated Mrs. Williams's garden from Capt. Decker's, dense as it seemed, was not to be relied on as a non-conductor of sound.

Usually, though not especially fond of her needle, Ray enjoyed the sewing-society; the infrequency of social gatherings in Crague adding zest to the meeting. But to-day she could do nothing but think of Sally; and presently she folded the unfinished apron, and whispered to Della Pencroft that she was going home. Blanche, though she abhorred sewing-societies in general, had graciously consented to attend that afternoon, feeling confident that after her long absence she would be the centre of attraction; but for once she found herself eclipsed. Old acquaintances shook hands with her in hearty country fashion, and expressed their pleasure in seeing her again; but they were too much interested in Sally to give her the attention she had expected to receive, and, had not she herself been interested, she would have been more ready than ever to pronounce Crague society intolerable. Still, not finding a red flannel shirt-sleeve a very desirable piece of work for an August afternoon, she was glad to make her escape with Della and Ray.

"Now, girls, come take tea with me," said Della, — the three, after apologizing to Mrs. Williams for going before refreshments were served, having

slipped quietly out the back way: "it is early, and we can have a nice visit." And Blanche, thinking of Gene, accepted the invitation without waiting to be urged; but Ray, too sad at heart to be sociable, excused herself, and turned toward home, taking the 'long-shore path. Usually, when tired and troubled, a walk by the water brought rest and cheer; but that summer afternoon it had no power to charm away her sorrowful thoughts. A thick gray fog had hidden the sun; and the voice of the waves was like a moan, eerie and boding. Was it nothing but the voice of the waves? She stopped and listened. An empty boat came drifting toward her on the rising tide, and one look told her that it was Sally Decker's "Gypsy." But how came it here? Suddenly the setting sun fringed the gray curtain of fog with a thousand jets of flame; and in the flood of radiance that streamed across the water, Ray descried a human figure standing on Gull Rock, a huge mass of granite some half a mile from shore. To spring into the boat, which had stranded at her feet, to seize the oars, and row with all her strength for the jagged pyramid up which the merciless waves were creeping inch by inch, required no deliberation. There was not a moment to lose. Both wind and tide were rising, and in less than half an hour the only standing-place would be submerged. It was a hard pull; but Ray was used to the oars, and her firm, swift strokes made good headway in spite of opposing elements. As she neared Gull Rock, the figure, which had been crouching as if to avoid

observation, stood upright, and she saw that it was Sally. With redoubled energy she bent to her task, for she knew that the girl could have but one purpose in being there; and she found herself shivering with dread lest she should leap into the water before she could reach her.

"Sally! Sally!" she called with piercing shrillness, as she saw her lean over the craggy ledge: "wait! wait! I want to speak to you, Sally."

"O Ray! why did you come to me?" she cried, as Ray caught up the painter, and sprang out.

"Because I knew you would be drowned if some one did not come to you," said Ray, with difficulty keeping on her feet; for the rock was already nearly covered, with the exception of a stark and ragged peak which afforded no foothold, and which even at high tide was to be seen like a warning finger pointing to hidden perils.

"But I want to be drowned," said the girl, drawing back as Ray seized her hand. "I know what they were all saying this afternoon. Aunt Judith had driven me from the house with her sharp words; and hiding there under the hedge, I could not help hearing the cruel things they said."

"But that doesn't make it right for you to drown yourself," said Ray. "Come, dear, come: we must not stay here."

"No, no! I can't go back," said Sally piteously. But Ray had her arms about her, and with a strength born of the emergency she forced her into the boat.

"Now take an oar, and help me row," she said,

more with a view to keeping her occupied than from any want of assistance; for, with both wind and tide in its favor, the "Gypsy" sped over the waves in the waning light, needing scarcely more than steering.

As they approached the shore, Ray, to her intense annoyance, saw Blanche, with Gene and Della, strolling leisurely by. The three stopped, the instant they recognized her.

"What are you doing, Ray?" cried Blanche, in a sharp, vexed voice.

"I am going home with Sally," Ray answered. And without waiting for her sister's consternation to shape itself into speech, she pulled past them, and drew up at the "Gypsy" pier.

"Now be brave, Sally," she said, as she led the reluctant girl toward the house. But her own heart was beating tumultuously at the thought of facing aunt Judith; for aunt Judith was one of those hard, unsympathetic women, from whom all young things seem instinctively to shrink. Of the bluff old captain she did not stand so much in dread. But it was aunt Judith herself that opened the door in answer to her timid knock; and except for the thought of Sally's need, she would scarcely have ventured to enter.

"I don't wish to hear any thing about her," said aunt Judith, at the first mention of Sally's name: "she has disgraced herself and all her friends; and, if she is miserable and unhappy, it is no more than she deserves, — the ungrateful creature!" And readjusting her glasses, which in her excitement she

had pushed up over her eyebrows, she stalked from the room, leaving Ray alone with the captain.

"Please don't be angry with her, Captain Decker," Ray entreated, coming closer, and laying her hand on his arm: "she is very sorry and unhappy, and if you are not good to her she may do something desperate. She tried to drown herself this afternoon."

"What!" cried the captain, wheeling round. "O my God! where is she? My baby-girl! my poor little motherless Sally!"

"Here, father," said a broken voice, Ray having purposely left the door ajar.

The captain held out his arms; and, as Sally sprang toward him, Ray slipped out into the twilight, and hastened toward home. She had gone but a few steps when she met her father; Blanche's indignation against her for being seen with Sally having sent him out to meet her, to hear an explanation from her own lips.

"What is it all about, sweetheart?" he asked, taking both her hands in his.

"It is about Sally, father; and it is all so sad, so dreadful!" she said, speaking as fast as possible, to keep back the tears. "She is in such trouble, papa! She is almost heartbroken; and this afternoon, as I was coming home, I saw her standing on Gull Rock; and, knowing that she would be drowned if she staid there, I rowed out and brought her home. It is what any one would have done, and I don't think they ought to blame me."

"No one shall blame you, darling," he said, stoop-

ing to kiss the wet face. But the moment they entered the house, Blanche, meeting them in the hall, began her lecture.

"Wait, my dear, till you understand it," said her father; and then he told Ray's story.

"That alters the case, of course," said Blanche coldly; and knowing that Gene, seated in the library, the door of which she had unintentionally left open, was hearing it all, she let the subject drop for the time. Ray would gladly have gone at once to her room: but Della, who had followed Blanche into the hall, slipped her arm about her, and, before Ray was fairly conscious of what she was doing, drew her into the library; and once there it was not easy to retreat. No one, however, seemed inclined to converse, and presently Blanche proposed having some music. Eugene, who had scarcely opened his lips since the others entered the room, rose as she seated herself at the piano, and mechanically took his place at her side to turn the pages; but his thoughts were elsewhere. He had been making discoveries that evening; and, though apparently absorbed in watching the play of Blanche's fingers on the keys, he was mentally ejaculating, "What fools we have been, Donald and I!"

"Please turn!" said Blanche impatiently.

"I have turned," was his answer.

Something in his voice, rather than the words themselves, struck Blanche unpleasantly. What ailed him? she wondered; and not caring to have any misunderstanding with him at present, she lifted

her eyes from the music, and gave him one of her sweetest smiles. But Gene's gaze was fastened on the notes, and the smile was lost. While she was still playing, Donald came in. His visits, since Blanche's return, had been infrequent and brief, and Gene imagined that it was because he had not yet recovered from his disappointment; but to-night he saw, with a sudden pang of jealousy, that, after bowing coolly to Blanche, he turned to Ray, and slipped a tiny white parcel into her hand. Had he, too, discovered that they had both been idiots? And Gene went home feeling dissatisfied and unsettled. Perhaps had he known that the mysterious little box that Donald handed to Ray contained, not an engagement-ring, but merely a rare specimen of the *lampyris noctiluca*, his sleep that night might have been less troubled.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE GREATEST OF THESE IS CHARITY."

IT was not until after the visitors had taken leave, that Ray remembered that she had had no supper.

"Laws now, honey, I ain't got nuffin saved fo' yo', kase I s'posed yo' was gwine to get yo' supper to the missioner meetin'," said Dido. "'Pears like dey doesn't treat yo' berry scrumptious."

"Oh! I ran away, Dido, and went rowing: that was the trouble," said Ray, as she buttered a cold biscuit. But Dido's kindly eyes were quick to see that some deeper trouble was burdening her young mistress, and she asked no more questions. Mrs. Braddington was less considerate. She had overheard enough of the conversation in the hall to make her both vexed and curious; and having immediately on the departure of their guests received from Blanche the particulars in full, she was prepared to pour out the vials of her wrath the moment Ray presented herself.

"I have always told you that Sally was not a fit associate for you," she said sharply, "and I should think now you would be ashamed to be seen with her."

"But what else could I have done, mamma?" asked the girl with a vain effort to speak calmly.

"If you had a grain of common-sense, you would not need to ask such a question as that," said her mother. "You could have told the captain about it, and he would have gone after her; but you are just like your father, always trying to help people who haven't the slightest claim upon you, and getting yourself into trouble to pay for it."

"Poor little girl!" said Mr. Braddington, who had come from the library purposely to interpose in her behalf. "It is a sad fate to have such a papa, but misery loves company;" and his hand was laid softly on the brown head. Ray's eyes were full of angry tears: but the touch of that maimed hand quieted her; and, without waiting for her mother to begin again, she escaped from the room, and hastened up stairs.

It was early, but she was tired and unnerved; and when, half an hour later, Blanche came up, she found her in bed, and apparently asleep; but the closed lids covered wakeful eyes, so deep were her pity and anxiety for Sally. What was to become of her? Her trouble seemed so terrible, so hopeless! Even if her father and aunt forgave her, how could life be made endurable to her? Might it not have been better, after all, if she had left her to herself? But morning brought healthier thoughts. There was surely no trouble that God could not give one strength to bear. If Sally could find God, there was still hope for her; and then she wondered if it

might not be possible for her to help her to find him. But she could not reconcile herself to seeing her, in direct opposition to her mother's wishes.

"I must ask father about it," she said; and knowing that he was an early riser, she stole down to the library before Blanche was awake.

"Papa, must I give up Sally?" she asked, leaning over his shoulder.

Mr. Braddington looked up anxiously into the sorrowful young face. He was scarcely prepared for this emergency: yet how did he know, since she had been commissioned to rescue the girl from death, but it might devolve upon her to reconcile her to life?

"No, darling," he said, drawing her face to his, "not while you can do her any good." And Ray returned his kiss, feeling that now she could care for Sally with a clear conscience.

That afternoon Blanche, going up-stairs, met her on the landing with her hat in her hand.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To walk," said Ray hesitatingly.

"You are not going to see Sally, I hope," cried Blanche. "Well, I must say, Ray Braddington, you ought to have a guardian appointed!"

"It is not going to do me any harm, Ban, to interest myself in Sally," said Ray, with quiet decision. "The poor girl is almost in despair, and to know that she has even one friend left may perhaps keep her from trying to drown herself again. At all

events, I am not going to desert her so long as there is a possibility of my helping her."

Blanche gave an impatient little shrug.

"The less you trouble yourself about Sally, the better," she said coldly; but Ray, without answering, put on her hat, and went her way.

"Poor Sally! They are making her punishment harder than she can bear," said Mrs. Pencroft sorrowfully, on hearing of the girl's attempt to drown herself; and it was perhaps owing to a hint from his wife, that Mr. Pencroft, at the next prayer-meeting, read Paul's exhortation on charity, following it with an appeal so earnest and pointed that his hearers had no difficulty in making the application.

But Blanche, who had accompanied Ray to the meeting simply because she had nowhere else to go, and did not care to spend the evening alone with her father and mother, listened to his exhortation with curling lip.

"They may talk as much as they please about charity," she said to Ray, after they had gone to their room that night, "but I don't see how people who have disgraced themselves, as Sally Decker has disgraced herself in secretly marrying that worthless sailor, — more than likely it was a sham marriage at that, — can expect any one to have charity for them."

"But they need it just the same," said Ray, forbearing any direct allusion to Sally.

"Oh! of course they want the comfort of it,"

answered Blanche; "but for my part I believe in treating people according to their deserts."

"But it is not always easy to tell what one's true deserts may be," urged Ray. "Perhaps, if we could put ourselves in other people's places"—

"Oh, shut your eyes, and go to sleep!" cried Blanche impatiently: "we have had preaching enough for one night."

CHAPTER VIII.

BEACH-PLUMMING.

BEACH-PLUMS were ripe again. Up and down the shore they hung purpling in the sun; the sturdy bushes on which they grew, under shelter of the sand-dunes, being, with the exception of a few stunted cedars, the only vegetation that could maintain a foothold in the loose and brackish soil. And again the girls had come to fill their baskets: for the fruit, though somewhat acrid in its natural state, makes a delicious jelly; and Ray, chiefly because her father preferred it to any other, was always careful to put up a generous supply for winter use. The day was very much like the one that brought them on the same errand a year ago; but on this occasion Donald and Eugene, and Della and young Drome, were with them, and, in spite of certain misunderstandings, the whole party seemed in fine spirits. For the first half-hour, however, no work was done; every one claiming the privilege of lounging a while on the beach.

“Come!” said Ray, at last, “I am going to picking. The bushes are loaded, and papa Brad-dington shall have jelly and preserves to his heart’s content.”

"Oh! you are too practical altogether," said Blanche. "It is a great deal pleasanter sitting here than gathering plums. I wish preserves grew like honey, ready for use: it would save a world of trouble."

"And take away all their flavor," said Donald. "I think I have heard it remarked, that nothing is worth having that is not worth working for. Even for honey you must run the risk of getting a sting."

"For my part," said Pencroft, "half the flavor of beach-plums is in the association, the thought of where they grew, in this wild, free place, sprinkled with the spray of the sea. If I were a poet, I am not sure but I might become sentimental over them some winter night, just as certain poets grow sentimental over Italian wines. I remember reading once" —

"Now, Gene," cried Ray, "if you begin telling a story, we shall sit here half the afternoon, and go home with empty baskets."

"Then, let him tell it while we pick. It will help keep us together," said Della.

"There is not much to tell," said Gene, as they gathered around a clump of bushes. "A poor soldier, who lay wounded in the hospital, took a fancy that nothing would cure him but some of the wine from his father's vineyard. His attendants looked at each other hopelessly. His father's vineyard was a hundred leagues away, and the war had cut off all communication with that part of the country. His physician brought the choicest of wines from

his own cellars, but the sick man turned from them with indifference. They might be rare and costly, but the grapes from which they were pressed did not grow on the sunny hillside by his father's house. One day an old woman hobbled into the hospital, and Antoine recognized her as a near neighbor. 'Ah! why did you not bring me some wine?' he asked, when he had inquired for the welfare of his father and mother. The woman drew a bottle from her basket. 'Take it,' she said, wiping away her tears: 'your mother gave it to me for my boy, whom I came to find; and he is in heaven.' The nurse filled a goblet. 'Ah!' cried Antoine, holding it up and letting the light sift through it; 'now I feel the sunshine of Italy. Now I am at home once more! I hear my little sisters laughing among the vines. I see my father and mother plucking the purple clusters. I hear the wind lifting the great green leaves. This is wine! There is life in every drop.' And he drained the glass."

"And did he get well?" asked Ray, who, with her elbow on her knee and her chin in her hand, had been drinking in every word.

"No, he died; but he died happy," said Gene with a semi-tragic air.

"Eugene Pencroft, you never read that story! You made up every word of it!" exclaimed Ray indignantly.

"Ray Braddington, you haven't picked a plum," answered Gene, smiling at her earnestness.

"Neither have you," retorted Ray, as she took

up her empty basket; "and I think you are cruel as can be, to let that poor fellow die, when you might just as easily have sent him home to his own vine and fig-tree."

"If it is only a romance, what difference does it make?" said Blanche.

"It makes a very great difference," said Ray. "Stories that end unhappily always have a depressing effect; and it is the duty of all story-tellers to make the conclusion of their stories as cheerful as possible."

"Whether truth or fiction, it shows the force of association," said Donald. "I dare say a German would have the same feeling about sourcrout."

"O you unromantic mortal!" exclaimed Blanche, daintily sniffing her violet-scented handkerchief; "as if the least shadow of sentiment could be connected with sourcrout!"

"Why not," said Donald, "as well as with pumpkin-pies and buckwheat-cakes? There is nothing that will take a New-England boy's heart back to his native hills like a plate of buckwheat-cakes, or a generous slice of pumpkin-pie."

"I think I could manage two slices, at the least, this very instant," said Gene. "This salt air always makes me hungry, especially when I am picking beach-plums for a living."

"Do hear him!" said Della. "Why, he hasn't picked a quart."

"Now, if you will all stop talking and go to work in earnest," said Ray, much as if addressing a set

of refractory children, "I'll promise you a nice little lunch before we start for home."

"Whence will you conjure it, 'my quaint Ariel'?" asked Gene dramatically.

"My lord, it shall be done," answered Ray, with an air of mystery; "but no one shall have a morsel until these baskets are filled to the brim." Whereupon every one made a great show of diligence.

"Beach-plums have pleasant associations for me also," said Donald presently to Blanche, the others having disappeared behind a sand-hill. "They always make me think of the little girl for whom I gathered them years ago."

"I wonder if I know her," said Blanche archly.

"I knew her, and I loved her," said Donald with grave earnestness. "I have loved her all these years."

The sudden quaver in his voice constrained Blanche to lift her eyes; and the look of tender, patient love that met them made her speechless.

"Listen to me one moment, Blanche," he entreated. "If you love Gene, I will never trouble you again; but if not, O Blanche, Blanche! let me hope that some day I may win your love."

He had lifted his hat while speaking; and Blanche, looking up at him as he stood there, with the wind tossing the hair from his forehead, and his face transfigured for the moment with a light which she had never seen in it before, was forced to acknowledge to herself that he was a kingly-looking lover,

—forced to acknowledge too, that it would not be hard to give the love he craved; and with this involuntary admission came an almost irresistible impulse to surrender herself to his keeping. But the next instant she was chiding herself for her folly.

“Beach-plums have led us on forbidden ground,” she said, rallying a smile.

“But you have not answered me,” he said, looking down at her gravely, with folded arms.

“What! in regard to Gene?” she asked lightly. “Gene and I are very good friends. Whether we shall ever be any better friends than we are at present, is more than I can say.”

“Thank you,” he said curtly, stung by the coolness of her voice and manner, even more than by the words themselves; and, dropping his arms to his side, he turned away, and sauntered down the beach.

Meanwhile, Della and young Drome having strolled off by themselves, Gene had been devoting himself to Ray; for Donald’s evident desire to keep near Blanche convinced him that he had made a mistake in supposing that he had become interested in the younger sister; and he purposely drew the latter in another direction, in the hope that the two, if left to themselves, might arrive at a better understanding. In case that result could be reached, his own course was clear. In the midst of these speculations, Blanche unexpectedly stepped between them.

“Where is Donald?” asked Ray.

"I am sure I don't know," said Blanche, with assumed indifference. "He disappeared half an hour or more ago, and I have not seen him since. I dare say he is off looking for specimens."

"He is a deserter," said Rachel; and thinking that Gene might like a quiet talk with Blanche, she slipped away and improved the opportunity to prepare the promised lunch. It was a very frugal affair, however, and required but little time. Spreading a napkin on the sand, she placed upon it two or three piles of hard-bread and a plate of dainty cottage cheeses; while for color, in the centre was a mould of beach-plum jelly, ruddy and clear as if made of rubies. In lieu of plates, clam-shells, white as the finest porcelain, were laid along the border; and as soon as all was ready she began to sing,—

"Come unto these yellow sands."

At the first note, Gene sprang to his feet. "Come!" he shouted to Della and Drome: "that is the lunch-call."

"I am so glad she thought of it,—of the lunch, I mean," said Blanche; "for I am half starved."

As she spoke, they beheld Ray on the summit of the highest of the sand-dunes, tying a handkerchief to a "lookout."

"That's a signal for Donald," she said, running down to meet them. "He is off on a raid of some sort, and unless we hang out a reminder he will forget that any of us are in existence."

"He will have to make haste if he expects to find any thing to eat," said Pencroft. "We are hungry enough to create a famine here in less than ten minutes."

"Must we wait for him?" asked Blanche.

"No: sit down and help yourselves," said Ray; "he will probably be here soon." But they were half through before he came; and, to Pencroft's dissatisfaction, he went straight to Ray.

"Hold your hands," he said; and when she had spread her palms, he put into them a bird's nest filled with delicate shells and mosses. "Oh, thank you!" cried the girl; and Pencroft, looking up at her happy face, felt that his own case was hopeless. He knew that Donald had been bitterly disappointed, and it seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that in the re-action he should turn to Ray. That Ray should like him, was only natural, too, he generously admitted, thinking how well his name fitted him, — "Donald: proud chief;" and though, since that sudden anointing of his eyes, she had become too dear to him for him ever again to think of her with indifference, he mentally resolved not to stand in Donald's way. This heroic resolution, however, did not tend to increase his appetite; and leaning on his elbow, he fell to making hieroglyphics in the sand.

"Don't stop eating on my account," said Donald, helping himself to crackers and cheese.

At that moment a shriek from Della startled them all; and the girls sprang to their feet, and retreated

to a safe distance as a huge crab came sidling to the table.

"See here, old fellow! I thought you were safe in my basket," said Donald, fearlessly picking up the uninvited guest.

"That is a new kind of beach-plum," said Ray demurely.

"It is a kind worth studying," said Donald, not caring to confess how entirely beach-plums had slipped from his mind: "he has lost a claw, and I want to see if there are any signs of a new one coming."

"Let me look at him, please," said Della, drawing nearer. The others, too, grew curious; and before Donald realized that he was talking, their numerous questions had drawn from him a brief but instructive discourse on the anatomy of the crab.

"If ever Crague boasts an academy, we shall elect you professor of natural history," said Eugene, leaning so close to the crab that his nose was in imminent peril.

"It is a position that I should be happy to be worthy of," said Donald seriously.

Blanche, far more interested in the speaker than in his subject, watched him closely. How cool and self-possessed he was! She could not realize that this was the same man who an hour ago was suing for her love. She had read of men who, in consequence of being rejected, had become insane; of others who had tried to drown their sorrow in dissipation, and of others still who had drowned them-

selves ; and she had really been half-afraid, when Donald left her that afternoon, that he was meditating self-destruction in one shape or another. But it was evident to her now, that, however much he loved her, her refusal was not likely to crush him ; and while the discovery was a relief, it was also, to a certain extent, a disappointment. But Blanche was barely twenty ; and at that age one may be pardoned for not knowing that one who has been baptized with love cannot knowingly harm either himself or the loved one, and that the deeper and stronger the love, the less danger there is of its unpoising the soul.

The sun, a globe of flame, was dropping into the sea before any of them thought of going home.

"Aw, it is six o'clock," said young Drome, clicking his watch-spring.

"What ! so late !" cried Ray, catching up the diminutive table-cloth, and giving it a vigorous shake.

"It is all owing to your lunch," said Donald. "If you had given us nothing to eat, we should have been at home before this, driven by hunger."

"I should say that it was owing rather to your lecture," she answered. "If you had been less luminous, we might have seen where the sun was."

"He held us with a sharp claw," said Gene.

"And his remarks, though instructive, were somewhat crabbed," added Ray saucily.

"Come !" said Donald. "It is high time for me to be going, if this is the way I am to be

abused." And taking Ray and her basket in charge, he led the way, leaving Gene to look after Blanche.

"When is Blanche going back?" he asked, as soon as they were out of hearing of the rest.

"I hardly know," said Ray, all the brightness vanishing from her face and voice: "she talks of going next week, and I can't bear to think of it."

"Is there no way of keeping her?" asked Donald.

"I am afraid not," Ray said sadly. "Crague is very distasteful to her, and she is anxious to be with her class again."

"I should think she might have a class here," said Donald. "There are a dozen girls in the place who ought to be taking lessons."

"That is true," said Ray; "but a class here would hardly answer her purpose. It would not take her away from Crague."

"Perhaps the time will come when she will have a better appreciation of Crague," he said, in a voice that was both bitter and apprehensive.

Ray wondered at his mood. Had Gene regretted her going, it would have seemed only natural; but she had imagined that to Donald, under existing circumstances, her absence would be a relief; and not being quite sure that she understood him, she ventured no reply. But Donald was too pre-occupied to notice the omission, and during the remainder of the way they walked in silence.

CHAPTER IX.

DIDO'S OPINION.

AT dinner the following Sunday, Blanche remarked, with the utmost nonchalance, that she was not likely to have the pleasure of taking a Sunday dinner with them again very soon, as she expected to return to town on Wednesday. Ray looked up entreatingly.

"My poor darling!" said Mrs. Braddington, dropping her knife and fork; "my poor dear child, how can I let you go? If you were going to take your proper place in society, I could willingly give you up; but I cannot bear the thought of that dreadful class."

"Could you not content yourself here a little longer, daughter?" asked Mr. Braddington. "If I am successful in getting my new works published the coming year, we may all be able to go to town next fall for the winter."

"But meanwhile, papa, I may as well be improving the time," said Blanche, smiling serenely.

"Yes, my dear; but I think you can improve it to better advantage here for the present."

"Now, Jerome, why will you oppose her?" said

his wife. "I should like to know in what way she could improve her time in a place like this! And as for any likelihood that the rest of us will be able to go, it is the same old story that I have heard for a dozen years. She will be gray before she goes, if she waits for that. The most that I feel troubled about is the thought of her being obliged to work for a living, poor child."

"If she insists on going, it will be vastly better for her to have some definite occupation," said Mr. Braddington with unwonted sternness.

"Now, papa, don't look so solemn about it," said Blanche coaxingly. "I really think you ought to be glad to have me go, this salt air is so trying to my lungs," she added, with a laughing attempt to cough.

"That is a very hollow cough, I admit," said her father, smiling in spite of himself; for Blanche, sitting there cool and lovely in her white piqué, looked as blooming as a young Hebe.

"But seriously, papa, I shall have to go. I have already written to Mrs. Hedgway that I shall be there Thursday morning by the boat, and she will be expecting me."

"It will be very easy to let her know that you have changed your plan," said her father.

"Ridiculous, Jerome!" said his wife. "She is quite old enough to know her own mind; and if she thinks it best to go, do let her go in peace. It is sheer selfishness to want to keep her here."

"Nevertheless, she shall not go," he was on the

point of saying, but he doubted the wisdom of direct opposition ; and knowing that any further discussion of the subject would be a waste of words, he finished his dinner in silence.

Old Dido, who, while waiting on the table, had heard most of the conversation, returned to the kitchen shaking her head ominously.

"Misses heap sight better let marsa hab his own way," she said to Silas Crane, who was sitting on the outer door-step, with his elbows on his knees, enjoying the September sunshine. "De city ain't no sort ob a place fo' a gal like our Miss Ban, wid dat rosy-posy face ob hers."

"Reckon you're about right, aunty," said Silas, opening his tobacco-box, and deliberately rolling up a quid. "Miss Ban is one of them crafts that needs a stiddy hand to steer her, or the fust she knows she'll be runnin' aground."

"Now look y'here, yo' Silas Crane! if yo's a-gwine to sit and chaw tobaccah, yo' kin jes' go and lean agin a fence-post," said Dido with decision. "I isn't a-gwine to hab yo' a-disfiggerin' ob my clean steps on de sabba' day. 'Tain't a decent sort ob habit fo' a white man nohow."

"Oh! you're too perticler altogether, aunty. Howsomever, seein' it's so near dinner-time, I reckon I won't take a chaw jist yet." And Silas meekly returned the box to his pocket.

"I'se mighty glad dar's sumpin' dat'll keep de pyzon out yo' mouf once a day," said Dido; "but, la! you'll be habbin' dat box out agin de

werry fust ting, de minute yo' hab yo' puddin' swallowed."

"Well, what you blamin' me for, aunty? How do you 'pose I'm goin' to help it? Wasn't I fore-ordinated to use it?" said Silas; for fore-ordination no less than tobacco was a bone of contention between these two, and Silas often provoked Dido's wrath just for the sake of hearing her expound her views.

"Go 'long now wid yo' nonsense!" she answered. "Yo' needn't try to make dis chile b'lieve no sich doctrim. Yo's wus'n de heven, Silas Crane. 'Minds me ob a recurrence I hears ob once, ob an ole drunken wretch who was a-beatin' ob his wife, and when she done turn round and obmonster-cated wid him, sez he, 'What yo' blamin' me fo'? 'Tain't none of my doin's: it wur fore-ordinated from de beginnin' ob de world.' And dar's a heap o' folks jes' dat ah way, allers wantin' to frow de 'sponserbility ob dar own bad doin's on de Lord A'mighty, an' 'cordin' to my ideah sech people isn't much better dan de debble hisself."

"But if they're honest in believin' it, aunty, what you goin' to do about it?" said Silas. "You can't blame 'em for bein' consistent."

"But dey isn't consistere't," protested Dido; "not a bit mo' consistere't 'n Miss Ban am, makin' b'lieve she wants ter yearn her libbin', when it's nuffin but her wantin' to see what's a-gwine on in de world and hab her own way. Yo' isn't consistere't yo'self, Mr. Crane. Ef yo' was, what fo'

yo' want to fool away yo' time a-plantin' seeds in de spring ob de yeah? Ef de wegetables am fore-ordinated to grow dah, won't dey grow dah anyhow? Don't kim a-talkin' to me! Yo' knows jes' as well as I does, Silas Crane, dat ef yo' wants garden sass yo's got to sow de seed, and no fore-ordinatin' won't make cabbage-seed grow onions." And having delivered this clincher, Dido straightened her turban, and whisked into the dining-room, rejoicing that the opportune summons of the table-bell had given her the triumph of the last word.

That night Blanche, on going to her room, found Ray kneeling by the window in the starlight.

"What, crying?" she said, seeing as she drew near with the lamp that there were tears on her cheek. "Why will you be so silly, Ray? As long as I have made up my mind to go, why can't you, as mother says, let me go in peace?"

"But how can you make up your mind to go, Ban, while father is so much opposed to it? If you had no father and mother, and no home, it would be different."

"I hope I am old enough to decide for myself," said Blanche, with chilling dignity. "Father seems to think that because he is content to stay here year after year, I ought to be content to do the same; and perhaps I might be if I were fifty. At that age I don't think it would matter much, but at twenty one wants something different from this. I do, for one; and I dare say you do, if you would own the truth. I don't see how any young person

can be content to stay here. I wonder that Donald doesn't go away. And Eugene too: even if he takes his diploma, what will he amount to as a physician in Crague?"

"Perhaps they are getting here a better preparation for life than they could get anywhere else," said Ray, who sat facing Blanche with her hands clasped round her knees.

"What absurd ideas you do take into your head, Ray! As if one could be fitted for any thing in a village like this!"

"That depends entirely on the individual himself," said Ray warmly. "Alva Drome, so shallow and pompous, would never be likely to amount to any thing anywhere; but I have no fears for Donald and Gene. Of one thing I am certain: whatever else they may be, they will be good, true men."

Blanche laughed.

"You are welcome to both of them," she said patronizingly; "but I advise you not to make your choice until you see which is likely to be the more successful of the two. For myself, I intend to look higher."

"Look as high as you like, Ban, only be sure that he is good," said Rachel earnestly. "A bad man may do very well to spice a novel with; but in real life, to lean on and love till the end of your days, Ban, you want some one whom you can trust with your whole heart, through and through."

"Oh, go to sleep, you romantic little preacher!"

said Blanche drowsily. And Ray, from the depths of her pillow, said good-night with the tears starting afresh. She had hoped to be able to persuade Blanche to yield to their father's wishes, but Blanche, as usual, had silenced her; and when at last she dropped asleep, it was with a melancholy sense of defeat.

CHAPTER X.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

WHEN Blanche reached Cliff Haven the following Wednesday, its glory had departed. The summer boarders had gone, the bathing-houses were closed, the pavilions dismantled, and the whole town wore the deserted look that makes any watering-place a forlorn spectacle in the fall. Consequently her aunt's invitation for her to spend a week at Beverley Cottage was no temptation. Her father had intended to accompany her; but finding that Mr. Pencroft and his wife were going to the city that day, he intrusted her to their care, Mr. Pencroft promising to see her safe under Mrs. Hedgway's roof. This arrangement was not unwelcome to Blanche, for her father's sad face was a constant reproach; but she would have been better pleased had it been Eugene instead of Mr. Pencroft, having from her childhood been under the impression that the latter could read her inmost thoughts; and dreading a private sermon, she left no lull in the conversation during the entire journey from Crague to Cliff Haven; and as soon as they went on board the boat she retreated to the ladies' cabin, and declined

to join her friends on deck, though the night was glorious. But Mr. Pencroft felt that he had a message to deliver, and was not to be baffled. It was not until the carriage stopped at Mrs. Hedgway's door, however, that he found his opportunity. Mrs. Pencroft, on the way from the boat, on the back seat with Blanche, had managed to whisper two or three words of motherly counsel, which Blanche had received with a serene smile, saying lightly, as the gentle little lady pressed a farewell kiss on her cheek, "Don't be troubled about me, Mrs. Pencroft. I don't think there is any danger of my being hurt by the gayeties of city life. I have no time for them." And she congratulated herself on having reached her journey's end without hearing from Mr. Pencroft. But Mr. Pencroft, on helping her from the carriage, took both her hands in his, and said, with fatherly tenderness, "Dear child, life everywhere is full of peril for young and old; and there is no safety for any of us except we put our hand into God's hand, and let him lead us."

"Thank you, Mr. Pencroft. Oh, there is Mrs. Hedgway waiting for me at the door!" And, with a hasty good-by, she ran up the steps; but just as she was putting out her hand to Mrs. Hedgway, she discovered that Mr. Pencroft, in his earnestness, had given her his wife's satchel, and, turning back to correct the mistake, she found him standing where she had left him, with his hand on the carriage-door, gazing after her with grave soli-

citude. To her great relief, however, he exchanged the satchels without further exhortation.

"I am afraid that his absent-mindedness will bring him into serious trouble some of these days," said Mrs. Pencroft, leaning out with a smile: "you would better see that he hasn't checked the wrong trunk."

"The trunk is all right," answered Blanche, hastening to say good-by again; and, as she re-ascended the steps, the carriage drove away.

Mrs. Hedgway, though secretly regretting her return, gave her a kindly welcome; and through the day there was so much to occupy her in one way and another, that the pastor's words were banished from her mind, but in the quiet of her own room that night they repeated themselves over and over with a persistency that vexed her.

"Why will people keep preaching to me?" she said angrily, "as if I were a child in leading-strings! Just because I detest Crague, they seem to think that I am on the road to destruction. If I were one of the soft-hearted ones, like Sally Decker, they might be troubled about me with good reason. I shall show them that their anxiety is wasted, and that I am quite equal to taking care of myself."

Her first step toward re-organizing her class was to call on Bessie Gilderman.

"I am so glad you have come," said Bessie in her bird-like voice, when Blanche presented herself. "I have been telling papa that I wished he would find out when you were to be back, and

he promised to call at your boarding-place this evening."

"It would have given me pleasure to meet him," said Blanche, putting the instruction-book before her pupil wrong side up in her vexation that her own haste had deprived her of the intended call.

"But I am glad that he will not have to go," said the child frankly: "it is so lonely for me when he is away in the evening."

"Yes indeed, it must be," said Blanche sympathizingly. But her sympathy did not overcome her regret.

A week or two later, however, the meeting she had so long desired came about in an unexpected manner. She was giving Bessie a lesson, and had seated herself at the piano to play a difficult passage for her, when the door opened, and some one entered the room. Supposing it to be one of the servants, she played on without turning; and not until she rose to give Bessie her place, was she aware that a gentleman was standing behind her.

"This is my papa, Mr. Gilderman, Miss Braddington," said Bessie, who was clinging to his arm.

"I think I have already had the pleasure of meeting Miss Braddington," said the gentleman, extending his hand. And Blanche, with heightening color, discovered in Mr. Gilderman the stranger who had come to her rescue on the Cliff Haven beach.

"This is really a charming surprise," he added. "I came up in great haste to see if I could secure

the services of Bessie's teacher in copying some music. It is a new publication, and has been received with such favor that the first edition is already exhausted, and the second will not be ready for two or three days. Meanwhile half a dozen copies are demanded for a concert to-morrow evening, and I have promised to furnish them. But I fear it will be too heavy a task for you."

"Not if you think I can do it satisfactorily," said Blanche modestly. "I am in the habit of copying for my father, but I hardly dare to undertake it for the public."

"I have no fears but it will be well done," said the gentleman, as he unrolled the music; "but it is an intricate affair, and you will find it somewhat fatiguing."

Blanche ran her eye over the opening staff, striking here and there a note on the piano.

"Pardon me, but this is not new, Mr. Gilderman," she said with a puzzled look. As she spoke, she caught sight of the initials J. W. B. in the corner. "Why, this is one of my father's compositions!" she exclaimed. "I was sure that I had seen it. I played the entire score for him the very day that it was finished." And she might have added, so disappointed him in the playing that he would have tossed the manuscript into the waste-basket, had not Ray, divining his intent, and divining, too, the soul of the melody, seated herself at the piano, and by her spirited rendering rescued it from the impending fate.

"Is it possible?" said Gilderman, looking down admiringly at the white hand toying with the keys. "We have been publishing for Mr. Braddington for several years; and though I have not the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with him, it delights me to know that you are his daughter." And this discovery, together with the recollection of the sea-side meeting, put them at once on a friendly footing.

"But I must not detain you," he said presently: "you will need to be industrious with all those copies to make." And, adding that he would like them by noon the following day, he gave Bessie a kiss, and shook hands again with Blanche as he said good-morning.

Had any one asked Blanche that day if she thought Mr. Gilderman a handsome man, she would unhesitatingly have answered "yes;" for at twenty a girl's ideal of manly beauty is seldom of the highest order. Yet possibly a woman of thirty might have said the same; for Mr. Gilderman had a fine physique, which his tailor spared no pains to set off to the best advantage. He had also fine eyes, — at least, a casual observer would have called them such, — and a forehead that betokened no mean degree of intellectual power; but the lower part of his face, in spite of the well-kept beard and mustache, indicated an ingrained coarseness and selfishness. A phrenologist would have said that the man could be either a saint or a fiend, according as the better or the baser part of his nature gained the ascendancy. But Blanche saw only the

royal forehead, the smiling eyes, the gleam of white teeth under the brown mustache ; and over all was the glamour of the fact that this man was the master of the Gilderman mansion, and — free to marry. Through the whole afternoon, as she bent over the music, the original of which her father's crippled hands had traced, this thought held the ascendancy. A new interest had come into her somewhat monotonous existence, and she coolly determined to make the most of it.

Mr. Gilderman himself called the next day for the copies ; and after that he lost no opportunity to further the acquaintance. Frequently, in the midst of Bessie's lesson, he would walk into the music-room, and, seating himself where he could obtain the best view of the pretty tableau, remain until the lesson was over, excusing the intrusion on the plea that he wished to see what progress the child was making.

"My little girl is lonely here," he said, during one of these morning visits : "I should be glad if I could find her a suitable companion." And owing to this suggestive remark, Blanche was not in the least surprised when, a few days later, she received a formal invitation to become the child's governess.

"Pray do not think of such a thing, my dear child," entreated Mrs. Hedgway, when Blanche told her of the proposed arrangement.

"But why not?" asked Blanche. "Hundreds of girls support themselves as governesses, and why should not I? It is vastly pleasanter than teaching a promiscuous class, and brings much better pay."

"No doubt it would be all right and proper, my dear, if Mr. Gilderman had a wife, or even if he had a mother or a sister with him as mistress of his house; but as it is, he shows himself either very selfish or very thoughtless in asking a young girl like you to take such a position."

"I am sorry that you disapprove of it, Mrs. Hedgway, as I have already accepted it," said Blanche in a voice in which there was more of triumph than regret.

"O my child! how could you, without first consulting your father and mother? You know that they will not sanction it. Tell him so, and retract your promise."

But the prospect of having a home of fashionable elegance, with a salary sufficient to enable her to gratify her love of dress, and, crowning all, the possibility of some day becoming the mistress of the mansion, was a temptation which Blanche had no wish to withstand.

"My father and mother are too far away to decide for me in a case like this, Mrs. Hedgway," she said stiffly; "consequently you must allow me to decide for myself."

For an hour her friend reasoned and remonstrated, but the only apparent effect was to make her hasten her preparations for going; and the next week found her established in her new home as Bessie's governess.

"I am afraid no good will come of it," said Mrs. Hedgway anxiously. "If Mr. Gilderman were

the right sort of a man, he would never have asked her to take the place." She had already written to both her sister-in-law and Mrs. Braddington, begging them to persuade the girl to give up the position; but Blanche had forestalled her in this, and before the warning letters reached their destination, the news of her good fortune, together with a glowing description of her new surroundings, had been received at both Craque and Cliff Haven.

"It breaks my heart to think of the poor child's having to be a governess," said Mrs. Braddington, wiping her eyes; "but it is a great improvement on giving music-lessons. It is really very genteel to be a governess. In half the English novels the heroine is a governess, and she almost invariably marries a duke or an earl. It would be nothing surprising if Blanche did something of the sort. She is certainly fitted to fill the highest sphere in social life, my poor darling!"

"Under some circumstances, there might be nothing objectionable in her becoming a governess," said Mr. Braddington, thoughtfully folding Blanche's letter; "but I fear that in the present case she has made a grave mistake in accepting the position. We must write to her at once to return to Mrs. Hedgway's. It is much the safer place for her."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Braddington. "Of course she would not have thought of going if there had been the slightest impropriety in it; and now that, for once in her

life, she has congenial surroundings, it would be simply cruel to compel her to give them up, and very embarrassing too. Besides, I dare say she will be a great help and comfort to that poor child."

"No doubt it is a very satisfactory arrangement, my dear, so far as she and her pupil are concerned," answered Braddington; "but I must find out what sort of a man this Mr. Gilderman is, before I can consent to leave our little girl under his roof."

"Why will you persist in calling her a little girl?" said his wife angrily. "She is almost as old as I was when I married you; and though of course she doesn't know as much of the world as I did at that age, she is quite capable of judging for herself; while as for Mr. Gilderman, I should think the fact that he is your own publisher would be a sufficient recommendation."

Braddington smiled with a look of patient forbearance.

"If it necessarily follows, my dear, that a man who publishes music has a soul in harmony with goodness, then certainly there is no cause for anxiety; but, unfortunately" —

"Oh, of course!" interrupted Mrs. Braddington: "I know very well what you are going to say, but I hope Blanche is capable of discerning the difference between a gentleman and a scoundrel."

"If so, she is wiser than most women — than most men, as for that," said Braddington. "It takes a clear eye to read character aright."

"I declare, Jerome Braddington!" cried his wife,

"I never saw any one so aggravating as you are, in all my days. One would think, to hear you talk, that the man was a perfect monster, a genuine old Blue Beard, when, I dare say, he is every thing that a man should be; and I do hope that you will not say a word to make the dear child unhappy."

"Rest assured that I shall not, unless it is absolutely necessary, my dear," he said gently.

"You know very well that it is not necessary," she answered sharply. "It is nothing in the world but your imagination. You are so set, Jerome, when you once get an idea into your head! One might as well try to fly to the moon as to undertake to turn you."

Braddington, without replying, withdrew to the library, whither Ray made haste to follow him.

"If Mr. Gilderman is a good man, papa, I don't think we need to be troubled," she said, drawing an ottoman to his knee.

"If we could only be sure of it, darlie," he said, stroking her hair; "but there are so many bad men in the world, — bad men who pass for good, — that I am afraid. Still, we will hope for the best."

But when Mrs. Hedgway's warning came, he felt that decisive action was imperative; and before Mrs. Braddington had finished reading the letter, he had written to Blanche, bidding her break her contract at once with Mr. Gilderman, and return to Mrs. Hedgway. Mrs. Braddington, too, took alarm, and added in postscript a pitiful entreaty; while Ray wrote a separate epistle, begging her

with all tender and loving words to give up the new enterprise, and content herself with her music-class. "Do it for father's sake," she implored. "I think it will almost break his heart to have you stay. Mamma, too, is troubled about it. Dear Ban, do give it up. However pleasant it may be for you, I am sure you will not be happy if you stay in opposition to their wishes. If you would only come home, dear, it would make us all so glad. We want you here. It is so lonely without you, Bansy; and mamma is really very miserable, and needs you to cheer her. Do come, Ban darling."

Blanche read these letters with compressed lips, standing by the open grate in her elegantly furnished room; and the moment the reading was finished, they were tossed into the fire. Though seriously disturbed by them, she was determined not to yield; but she prudently covered the determination under a seeming desire to be dutiful.

"Pray do not think me self-willed and obstinate," she wrote. "I do not want to grieve you; I do not want to give you a moment's uneasiness: I wish only to do what seems to me absolutely wisest and best. I am happy and content here, chiefly because I am independent. I give my time and services as little Bessie's teacher and companion, and receive in return a comfortable salary. I cannot tell you what a relief it is in a pecuniary way, from the uncertainty of transient scholars; and could you know what a gentleman Mr. Gilderman is, and what a warm affection my little pupil has

for me, you would, I am confident, put aside your prejudices, and congratulate me on my good fortune."

This, with much more in the same vein, was the answer received at Gullnest.

"It is just as I told you," said Mrs. Braddington triumphantly. "Every thing is as it should be, perfectly right and proper; and I hope now you will let the poor darling have a little peace."

But Mr. Braddington, far from satisfied, hastened to address a letter of inquiry concerning Gilderman to the friend who acted as his agent, and to whom, in his self-distrust, he submitted all his music before offering it to the publishers. In reply, he received the assurance that Gilderman had an honorable reputation, and was highly respected in business circles. And with this, simply because he could not bring himself to walk into Mr. Gilderman's house and take bodily possession of his daughter, he tried to be content. No amount of logic, however, enabled him to rid himself of anxiety; and Rachel, fully in sympathy with him, determined at last to go herself to the city to see if she could not persuade Blanche to return to Mrs. Hedgway.

"Do you think you could do without me for a few days, papa?" she asked.

"If you think you can do any good by going, dear child," he said, accepting the suggestion with eagerness, "go, by all means, and stay as long as you see fit."

But Mrs. Braddington would consent to nothing

of the kind. Blanche, precious as she was to her, was far less necessary to her comfort than Ray. Not even her husband, watchful as he was of her welfare, could fill Ray's place in anticipating her numerous wants. Besides, she could see no reason for her going. Blanche was comfortable and happy, and there was not the slightest call for any more opposition. And Ray, finding it useless to contend, quietly gave up the project, and, like her father, tried to be resigned.

CHAPTER XI.

GULLNEST.

DURING these unquiet days the two young men had continued to haunt the place as of old; partly, perhaps, from force of habit in Donald's case, but for Pencroft the attraction was quite as strong as in the days when Blanche was the magnet. Recently, being in need of funds for the prosecution of his studies, he had turned school-teacher, and consequently had but little leisure; but he still found time to interest himself in Ray's intellectual pursuits, keeping her supplied with books and magazines, and often reading to her by the hour while she sewed. And the sewing sometimes made slow progress; for whenever they came upon a sentiment or a proposition that challenged criticism, an animated discussion would ensue, during which Gene seldom failed to lose his place, and Ray her needle, — at least, the needle was usually forgotten while the discussion lasted, — for Ray had not the happy faculty of being able to sew and talk at the same time; and this, as she had all the making and mending to do for the family, was unfortunate. It was Ray who darned her father's stockings, as well as

copied his music; and the same deft hands fashioned her mother's wrappers and her own trim gowns. But sewing was not a passion with her, as it is with many women: she sewed simply from a sense of duty, and hence was the more easily betrayed into temporary forgetfulness. Even during the reading, if it chanced to be very absorbing, her work frequently lay unheeded in her lap, while she leaned forward with bated breath, fearing to lose a syllable; but she atoned for it by working all the more diligently when the reading and talking were over, the mental stimulus she had received serving as a motor to her hands. As for Pencroft, while he thoroughly enjoyed her appreciation of his favorite books, it mattered little to him what he was doing so long as he could be near her. He loved to watch her going about in her pretty, busy way, and to see the patience and gentleness with which she met her mother's incessant complainings; and it was the pleasure that he found in this nearness, rather than his fondness for music, that led him to persuade Mr. Braddington to give him a course in thorough-bass. But Ray had no suspicion of the truth. She was sure that he, as well as Donald, loved Blanche; and while she felt that the latter had dealt unfairly with them both, the possibility that either of them had withdrawn his allegiance had not entered her mind.

"Sho, now! wat fo' dem two young men keep a-comin' round heah?" said Dido to Silas Crane.
"Dey needn't s'pose dey kin make no compression

on Miss Ray. W'en Miss Ban am 'round dey's jus' ready to go down on dere marrowbows to her, an' w'en she's done gone out ob sight dey's all honey an' 'lasses to Miss Ray; an' Miss Ray, she am a lady, ebery inch ob her, an' don't need nobody's leabin's. Dar ain't a prince in de land w'at's too good for our Miss Ray."

"No use troublin' yourself about sech things, Dido," said Silas dogmatically; "might jest as well trouble yourself about the blowin' o' the wind. What is to be'll be; and you can worry till all the kinks are out of your hair, and it won't do the least airthly good if it's fore-ordinated."

"Yo' go 'long now, Silas Crane! an' don't yo' be frowin' out none ob yar ompertnence about de kinks in my ha'. Dey'm de genoowine article, dem kinks am. An' I doesn't want to heah none ob yer nonsense about fo'ordinati'n. Wot de Lord A'mighty gib folks common gumption fo', ef he ain't a-gwine to 'low 'em to make no use ob it? Hey? A young lady like our Miss Ray ain't a-gwine to frow herself away on de fust young gemmeman dat hab de ondashiousness to shine up to her, 'less he'm jest de right sort; I kin tell yo' dat, Mr. Crane. 'Cordin' to my obserwati'n, folks mostly fo'ordinates demsels, runnin' squar' in de face ob Providence w'en dere ain't no airthly squse. One ting am sartin: ef folks doesn't use dere own common senses, dere ain't nobody but dere own selves to blame, fo'ordinati'n or no fo'ordinati'n. Howsomever, Marse Gene and Marse Donal' dey moighty noice

young gemmen, an' Miss Ray might go fudder an' fare wusser."

"Course she might," said Silas, stealthily taking out his tobacco-box. "To be sure, they're not perticlerly forehanded so far's money goes; but they've both got brains, and they're clean-mouthed and open-hearted. There ain't no deceit nor underhandness about either on 'em, and that's a great disideration. You might sail round the world, and you wouldn't find no respectabler young fellers'n Gene Pencroft and Donald Keith; and if Miss Ray don't take one o'ruther of 'em I miss my guess."

"Well, yo' kin jest put up dat ole tobaccab-box, Mr. Crane, ef yo' doesn't want dat to go sailin' round de world. Yo'd be a heap sight cleaner-moufed yer own self, ef yo' wasn't fo'ebber chawin' dat befoluin' weed."

"It was fore-ordinated to be chawed, Dido, and you might as well make up your mind to it."

"Den it's fo'ordinated dat dis chile won't hab nobody chawin' it round her kitchen, so yo' better go 'long back to yer wood-pile, Mr. Crane. Marse Braddington was a-sayin' dis berry mornin' dat he'd like to hab dat wood all split an' piled afore de cole wedder sot in. Reckon yo'll hab to handle dat axe mighty libely, 'less you tink ef it 'm fo'ordinated to be split it'll be split, wedder or no; an' in dat case yo' ain't got nuffin to do but set on a log an' chaw."

"It's yourself that's talkin' nonsense now, Dido," said Silas, with an air of offended dignity. "You can't argerfy a p'int no more'n a porpoise." And,

shouldering his axe, he sauntered to the wood-pile.

"One ting am mighty sartin," said Dido to herself, as she watched his deliberate movements, "Silas Crane wasn't nebber fo'ordinated to die ob hard work. I's afraid Miss Ray'll die ob dat long afore he does; but if dere *am* any sich ting as fo'ordinati'n, I reckon Miss Ray'm fo'ordinated to get some sort ob compensary fo' allers doin' fo' odder folks, an' nebber tinkin' a word about her own bressed self. I jes' hopes it'll be some foine gemmeman comin' down wid a coach an' foah to marry her, an' tote us all 'long wid 'em to town. I mus' say, I doesn't want her marryin' no country trash."

Mrs. Braddington, too, was beginning to be troubled about Ray's matrimonial prospects; for, though accustomed to regard her as a child, she could not help seeing that she was growing up as fair and graceful as a wild rose, and the impossibility of her making what she considered an eligible marriage in Crague gave her new cause for lamentation. She had no sentiment to bestow on "the modest flower born to blush unseen."

"She might as well be awkward and ugly as to have a pretty face and a stylish figure, if we are always to stay in Crague," she said one day to her husband.

Ray, just returned from a walk with Della Pen-croft and young Drome, was coming up the steps at the moment with her hands full of autumn leaves

and grasses, her hazel eyes shining like stars, her hair, escaped from its fastenings, blowing in brown tendrils about her face, and her cheeks outglowing the maple leaves. Her father smiled to himself as he caught the vision. Blanche's beauty, like that of certain styles of painting, consisted chiefly of vivid contrasts: Ray's — except when some sudden excitement deepened her color — was that of harmonious blendings; and her father found in it a pleasure closely allied to that which he found in a perfect melody. She might have been plain and awkward, and he would have loved her all the same; nevertheless, her growing beauty was a daily joy to him, and had she been sighing for an admirer, she could have had none truer or more knightly than the gray-haired man who met her at the threshold with outstretched arms.

"Have you stripped the woods?" he asked, taking a flaming branch from her apron.

"Oh, if you could see them, papa!" she cried: "every tree looks like a 'burning bush.'"

"And your face is all in a blaze too," said her mother fretfully. "Why don't you wear a veil, child? Your complexion will be ruined."

"O mamma, you wouldn't want a veil if you were out in the woods to-day! You can't think how beautiful it is. It looks as if a veil had been spread over all the world, the sunshine is so soft and misty."

"It is just the weather to tan," said her mother. "You will look as brown as an Indian all winter."

Ray bit her lip, and silently busied herself with the leaves.

"What are you going to do with your day's spoils?" asked her father,

"Oh! various things," she said, her face brightening as she caught his eye: "there shall be wreaths and garlands all over the house."

"Pray don't take any of them into my room," said her mother: "every thing is faded enough now, without having the walls hung with dry leaves and grasses. They are just about as ornamental as your beetles and millers. Your tastes are perfectly barbarous, child. But it isn't to be wondered at in the least, considering your surroundings."

"That reminds me, papa," said Ray, looking up at her father with mingled mirth and entreaty: "did you see that article on the scarabée in the Review? It is very interesting."

"Is it? Then come read it to me," he said, carrying her off bodily with all her treasures. But for the remainder of the day the two devoted themselves to the assorting of leaves and grasses, to the utter neglect of every thing pertaining to the "scarabee."

"Dear me!" sighed Mrs. Braddington, leaning back in her chair and beginning to rock: "they will make a complete blue-stocking of her if they go on so. She takes more interest now in one of those dull articles in the Review than she takes in her personal appearance. It isn't natural, and it is high time it was stopped. It will ruin her chances for

marrying, except she takes up with Gene Pencroft or Donald Keith, and that she shall never do with my consent." And while she was mentally reiterating this determination, her chair gradually ceased its vibratory motion, and her troubles were buried for the time in her afternoon nap.

"I don't wish you to give either of those young men the least encouragement," she said the next day; a call from Donald for the purpose of leaving a duck which he had just shot on the marshes, serving to introduce the subject. "It is very kind in him to remember me as he does, and of course I cannot refuse his little offerings; but it is very evident that he has a double purpose in coming."

"What are you thinking of, mamma?" cried Ray, in amazement. "They are Ban's lovers, not mine. I try to be good to them because I am sorry for them, and — because I like them," she added laughingly. "They are like brothers to me, and you may be sure of one thing, mamma: I shall never encourage either of them until I know which one Ban is going to take. She has the first choice."

"Blanche will never take either of them — you may rest assured of that," said Mrs. Braddington sharply. "She has sense enough to look higher."

"Then, I am afraid there will be two broken hearts," said Ray, in a semi-tragic voice.

"There will be no one but themselves to blame: they should have been wiser in the first place," said her mother. But the discussion was abruptly ended by Gene's appearing at the door.

"I was at the office, and thought I would save you the trouble of going down," he said, handing Ray a paper and a letter.

"Oh, thank you! Won't you come in?" said Ray, forgetting her mother's recent injunction.

"Not just now," said Gene, bowing: "I will let you read your letter first. Perhaps I'll drop in to-night, and hear what she has to say." For the letter was from Blanche.

CHAPTER XII.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

“DO open it, child!” said Mrs. Braddington impatiently, for Ray was intently studying the address. It was in Blanche’s handwriting, yet it had an unfamiliar look that puzzled her.

“It is from Blanche, isn’t it?” asked her mother.

“Yes, mamma,” she said; and, hastily opening it, she began to read:—

“‘Dear Puss, I have’”—

Ray stopped, and glanced down the page.

“Why don’t you go on?” demanded Mrs. Braddington.

“In one moment, mamma,” said Ray, catching her breath.

But Mrs. Braddington could not wait.

“Do give it to me, if you can’t make it out,” she said, taking the letter from Ray’s unresisting hand. “I am sure the writing is plain enough.”

“‘Dear Puss, I have something to tell you which I wish you to break to father and mother with your usual discretion.’”

"What can she mean?" And Mrs. Braddington's hands began to shake.

"Oh! please let me read it first, mamma," entreated Ray, recovering herself.

"Be still, child," said her mother, beginning to read again:—

"I am sure you will all think it good news, yet I dare say it will startle you at first. My dear, I was married last evening to Mr. Otis Gilderman. Now, don't be shocked. It is the most sensible thing I ever did. I am sorry that you could not all be at the wedding; but Mr. Gilderman could not spare the time to go with me to Crague just now, as it is the busiest season of the year—in fact, I did not urge it, the old place looks so shabby: so we were quietly married by the Rev. Mr. Carliss in the church parlor. I wore a pearl-colored silk and a diamond ring. The diamond is superb. I wish you could see it. Mr. Gilderman says he shall be happy to know my family, and I think it quite possible that we may run down for a week or two some time next summer; but I hope the old house will be put in thorough repair before we come. I should be really ashamed to have him see it in its present condition. A very small outlay for paint and carpets would make it look like another place. You must try to persuade papa to attend to it for your own sake, Ray dear. It is bad enough to be condemned to live in Crague, without having to live in a house like that. It is time to dress for dinner, so good-by. I hope papa and mamma will not refuse me their blessing. Use your persuasive powers, my dear, to show them that I have acted for the good of all concerned, and oblige

"Your loving sister,

"'BLANCHE.'"

"I am sure she has acted very wisely," said Mrs. Braddington, as she folded the letter; "and we

must send her our congratulations at once. Now we can hold up our heads again; and just as soon as I can get any thing to wear, I shall go to see her. I do wish, Rachel, there was a dressmaker in Crague who knew any thing about the fashions."

But Rachel had vanished before the sentence was finished. Reaching the library, she threw herself sobbing into her father's arms.

"What is it, my darling?" he asked, smoothing the hair from her forehead.

"It is Blanche, our Blanche, papa! She is married to that man."

"What!" cried Braddington, with an unnatural sharpness in his voice.

"Oh! don't look so, papa," she implored, frightened by his stern face. "I ought not to have told you so suddenly. She asked me to break it gently to you and mamma; but mamma has read the letter, and thinks it is all right. O papa! a man whom she hardly knew! How could she do it without asking if you and mother were willing? And there are those two poor boys: what will become of them? But you must not be angry with her, papa," she added; it suddenly occurring to her that she was not exactly pouring oil on the troubled waters: "I am sure she did not mean to do wrong; and, if Mr. Gilderman is a good man, she may be very happy."

"I am afraid not," he said sadly: "she has not begun in the right way. But bring me the letter, dear, and let me see what she has to say in her own defence."

As Ray opened the door, she met her mother with the letter in her hand.

"Now, pray, what is there to cry about?" she exclaimed, catching sight of Ray's wet eyes. "You ought to be thankful that your sister has done so well. It isn't every girl that can marry into such an establishment, and I am thankful that she was sensible enough not to run the risk of losing the chance."

Mr. Braddington took the letter without answering, and read it through slowly and with contracting brows.

"Poor little girl! she has not waked up yet," he said, as he finished it.

"For pity's sake, don't go to talking sentiment," said his wife pettishly. "The girl has waked up enough to know that a rich husband is worth securing. Of course it would have been more satisfactory to have her married at home; but under the circumstances that was out of the question, and I think she has acted very judiciously."

"I hope she may never have cause to regret it," said Braddington gravely.

"Then, don't go to prophesying evil," was the impatient retort. "Rachel must write immediately, and give her our congratulations; and just as soon as I can get ready I shall go to see her." And, acting on this decision, Mrs. Braddington went to her room, and began at once to inspect her wardrobe, leaving her husband and Ray to condole with each other.

"I hope this little girl isn't going to be in such haste to leave her old father," said Mr. Braddington, putting both arms about Ray as if afraid that she, too, might slip away from him.

"O papa! as if there were any man in the world that I could love better than you," she said, stroking his beard.

"If your sister loved this stranger half as well as my girlie loves her father, I should be better satisfied," he said, leaning his head on her shoulder.

"Why, of course she loves him, or she couldn't have married him, papa," said Ray, with childlike earnestness. "Perhaps she loves him too much to say any thing about it."

"'Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh,' " said Braddington, thinking of the diamond ring.

"Rachel, come here!" called a shrill voice from the next room; and Ray, obeying the summons, found her mother in the midst of a heterogeneous collection of finery.

For weeks she had thought herself scarcely able to leave her room; but Blanche's letter had thoroughly roused her, and she had already ransacked every trunk and bureau.

"Come, we must go to work," she said, shaking out a heavy black silk. "I have been saving this for years; and here is a Turk satin which I never wore but once."

"O mamma, how lovely!" cried Ray, who had

never before seen the dresses, Mrs. Braddington having kept them under lock and key.

"They were lovely once," said her mother, smoothing down the lustrous folds. "But I am afraid Blanche will think them dreadfully old-fashioned. I would have given them to her when she went away, if they had been suitable for a young girl. It is fortunate now that I kept them, though I dare say it will cost almost as much to have them made over as it would to buy something new. I think, on the whole, I will do nothing with them till I get there. A fashionable dressmaker will give them altogether another look. But there is enough else to do, child. I want my brown cashmere made into a wrapper, and I shall need two or three fresh breakfast-caps."

"Isn't father going with you?" inquired Ray.

"What a question to ask! As if I could take such a journey alone! But he will not want to stay more than two or three days, probably, while I intend to stay a month at the least. What is the use of having a daughter handsomely settled in life, if one isn't to have the privilege of visiting her? I dare say you would like to go too; but I know your father will not want to stay, and one or other of us would have to come back with him: so I think it will be better for you to wait."

"How soon will you be ready, my dear?" asked Mr. Braddington, from the library door.

"Not before the last of next week, at the earliest," answered his wife.

"O my dear! I can't possibly wait till then," he said, beginning to pace the room. "I should feel like starting to-night if there were any way to go."

"Now, Jerome, do be reasonable, and do stop tramping round. You will be sure to step on something. There! there you go now! I knew you would — right on that elegant lace collar! Oh, you do make me so nervous, I could fly!"

Braddington stopped short, and, picking up the collar, placed it gently on his wife's neck.

"Couldn't you let these things wait, dear?" he asked, sitting down beside her.

"That is just as much as a man knows!" she exclaimed, snatching the collar from her neck. "As if I could go to visit in Mr. Gilderman's house looking as if I had just escaped from the ark! I should be ashamed to have even the servants see me. Besides, what difference does it make, a few days sooner or later? She is married, and you can't unmarry her."

"We can satisfy ourselves that it is all right," he said. "I can't endure this suspense. We must start to-morrow, my dear, even if we have to sit up all night to get ready."

"What an unreasonable man you are, Jerome!" said his wife, beginning to cry. "I should think for Blanche's sake you would want me to go looking as respectable as possible. But of course, if you have made up your mind, there is nothing more to be said. It would be all the same if I had to go in a calico gown." And Mrs. Braddington wiped

away a fresh flow of tears, and directed Ray to gather up the various articles of apparel scattered about the room. "Put every one of them out of my sight," she said, with the air of a martyr. "If your father is determined to go to-morrow, it is of no use for me to think of going with him."

"Oh! we can easily have you ready, mother," said Ray. "Your black empress-cloth will do to travel in, and Ban can have the others altered for you by the time you are rested enough to need them."

"I don't wish to hear any thing more on the subject," said Mrs. Braddington, with a dismissive wave of the hand; and Ray, gathering up the gowns and laces, carried them to the library, and, depositing them on the sofa, went to the kitchen to prepare her mother's supper.

"Poor mamma! perhaps a cup of tea will quiet her nerves," she said to herself, as she cut a slice of bread to toast. "If Blanche had let us know in time, we might at least have had a loaf of cake in honor of the wedding." And feeling that the occasion demanded some sort of demonstration, she garnished the table with an elegant cut-glass preserve-bowl, in the centre of which quivered a transparent pyramid of beach-plum jelly; a tea-rose from her window-garden was put in a vase beside her mother's plate, while at her father's place she laid a crown of autumn leaves.

"Got comp'ny to tea, Miss Ray?" asked Dido, who considered the glass bowl—one of the few

relics of palmier days — far too precious for common use.

“There is company in the family, Dido,” answered the girl, with a laugh that ended in a sigh.

“Wot yo’ mean by dat, chile?” asked Dido, with her arms akimbo.

“I mean that sister Ban is married, Dido, — married to Mr. Otis Gilderman; so we must do what we can to celebrate the event.”

“Well, now, I is obfustercated, ’clar for it!” said Dido, dropping into the nearest chair. “Miss Blanche done gone an’ got married! Well, I nebber! S’pose Sile Crane’ll say now dat it were all fo’ordinated, when it’s nuffin in de world but her bein’ so determinated to go her way ’thout axin’ anybody’s leave. Ain’t she gwine ter bring her husband down to see yo’, nur nuffin?”

“Not just yet, Dido. Mr. Gilderman can’t leave his business at present, but father and mother are going to start to-morrow to make them a visit. We had a letter from sister Ban to-day.” And, even as she spoke, Ray was obliged to administer a quieting little pat to her conscience, knowing that she was intentionally giving Dido the impression that her father and mother had received a direct invitation.

“An’ isn’t dey gwine to took yo’ too, honey?”

“Not this time. We can’t all go at once very well, so I am going to wait. Now, if the eggs are poached, ring the bell, please, while I go see if mother is ready for tea.”

But Mrs. Braddington, who had thrown herself on the bed, could not be persuaded to come to the table. So Ray drew a stand to the bedside, and arranged the repast as temptingly as possible, with the white rose in the centre; and though her mother protested that she felt as if she never wanted to see another mouthful of food, Ray had the satisfaction, on returning from the dining-room half an hour later, to find that the egg, together with a fair share of the toast and jelly, had disappeared.

"And now, papa," she whispered, "if you will help me take a trunk into the library, we'll have mamma packed up and ready to start before she knows what we are about." And papa Braddington, wearing the leafy coronal with which Ray had crowned him, went submissively up to the attic, Ray leading with a lamp in her hand; and, after several collisions of his royal head with the unyielding rafters, came down with a huge trunk on his shoulder.

"What more can I do to help you, deary?" he asked, as Ray began to fold and pack.

"Nothing, thank you, papa, only please don't look so sorrowful. I am sure it will be all right with Blanche."

"I hope so, little comforter," he said, turning back to his desk. But he was not in unison with his work that night, and no new notes were added to the half-written score before him. Ray, however, thinking that he was composing, and fearing to disturb him, worked on in silence; but her

thoughts, meanwhile, ran riot. It was so hard to realize that Blanche was married, — that she could never again be the same Blanche, their Blanche. It would have seemed so different if she had only married some one whom they knew, instead of bringing this stranger into the family. And then she fell to wondering if Ban really thought this man superior to Donald Keith and Eugene Pencroft.

“Poor fellows! how shall I ever break it to them?” she said to herself.

In the midst of these cogitations, Dido knocked at the door to say that “Marse Gene” wanted to see her.

“O Dido, not to-night! I am too busy. He can come to-morrow. Tell him that father and mother are going to town to-morrow, and that I can’t spare a moment. Tell him — no, I will tell him the rest when I see him,” she added, glad that she had an excuse for delaying the revelation. So Dido, with much dignity, delivered the message, feeling her own importance not a little enhanced by the fact that she shared the family secret; and Gene went away disappointed and perplexed.

“I am afraid that it will be harder for him than for Donald,” said Ray to herself, as she returned to her packing. “Donald has known so long that there was no hope for him. Dear! dear! why couldn’t Ban come home and be married in the good old-fashioned way? Then there would have been no need of explanations.”

It was a query in the girl’s mind, as she laid the

last garment in the neatly packed trunk, whether, after all, her labor had not been in vain, thinking it more than probable that her mother would refuse to go. But when, the next morning, she went to carry her breakfast to her, she found her dressed for the journey. Wisely taking it as a matter of course, she put down the tray without question or comment, and was turning to leave the room when her mother stopped her, asking sharply, —

“What have you done with my dresses, child?”

“I put them in your trunk, mamma.”

“What in the world did you want to do that for, till you knew whether or not I was going?”

“I thought it was better to have them ready in case you did decide to go. But I can take them out, mamma, if you wish.”

“Let them stay where they are,” said her mother shortly. “I may go, and I may not. Did you put in that box of laces? and my fan and gloves? Oh! it is shameful to have to be hurried off in this way. I dare say you haven’t put in half the things I shall want.”

“I put in every thing I could find that I thought you might need, mamma,” said Ray.

“I need an entire new outfit, as for that,” said her mother. “I have really nothing that is suitable to take with me. Did your father order the stage?”

“I think he told Silas to order it last night. Perhaps I would better see about it,” and Ray hastened out.

When Mr. Braddington, on rising from breakfast,

went to his wife's room, he found her putting on her cloak.

"What, dear, so nearly ready?" he said, with pleasurable surprise. "You are early."

"It doesn't follow that I am going because I have my wraps on," said Mrs. Braddington tartly, as she tied her bonnet-strings. "I may go, and I may not. It depends entirely on how I feel when the stage comes. It ought to be here now. I dare say that stupid Silas forgot to order it."

"Silas says he attended to it last evening, mamma," said Ray; "but it is not due for half an hour yet."

"Then, I may as well make up my mind not to go, for I shall be tired out by that time." And Mrs. Braddington sank into her armchair, and called for the camphor-bottle.

"O mamma! you have forgotten your overshoes," exclaimed Ray, as she saturated a handkerchief; "and I think it would be wise for you to take your soapstone: it will very likely be cold riding." And with one suggestion after another, fluttering about her, and giving sundry little touches to her dress and bonnet, she managed to keep her mother's mind diverted till the stage was at the door.

"Come, my dear," said Mr. Braddington, offering his arm with gentle gallantry, as "Joshway" carried out the trunk.

"Don't hurry me so," she said peevishly. "I have waited half an hour for him, and now he can wait for me." And it was not until the trunk had

been strapped on, and she herself was safe inside the stage, that Braddington felt sure of having his wife's company.

"I wish my girlie were going too," he said, lingering for a moment with the girl's hand in his.

But Ray smiled bravely as she returned his kiss, and gayly waved her handkerchief to them as the stage lumbered away. The moment she was in the house, however, she threw herself down, and cried without restraint.

"Dar now, honey," said Dido, coming to the library at the sound of the sobs, and dropping down beside her, "gittin' married ain't like dyin', chile. Miss Ban'll be a-coming home some ob dese days as fine as a fiddler, an' moighty-proud yo'll be ob her."

"Oh! I know it, Dido. But it will never be the same again: she will always belong to that man. He must be a good man, or Ban wouldn't have married him; but it seems so odd to have a brother-in-law that we have never seen."

"Umph!" ejaculated Dido, with elevated brows, "ef he'd 'a' ben de right sort ob man he wouldn't nebber hab wanted Miss Ban to done go fo' to marry him widout axin' her pa an' ma. I doesn't opprube ob no sech pussons. But ef Miss Ban am happy, I reckon de rest ob us kin stan' him; so yo' jes' wipe yo' eyes, honey, an' come help me settle de house. Yer ma's room's all topsy turzy."

Ray, ashamed of her tears, choked back a final sob, and sprang up and went to work industriously.

By the time she had put the rooms in order, she remembered her neglected autumn leaves, and, in the re-action of a healthy nature, was soon absorbed in arranging them, even trilling a bit of a song now and then as she fastened the brilliant clusters to the wall. In the midst of her pretty work she heard her name called ; and, looking down, she saw Gene leaning through the open window, and quietly surveying her.

"Put on your wraps, and come out," he said. "It is a holiday, and I want to improve it. Alva Drome and Della will be along soon, and Donald has promised to meet us at Chestnut Hill. What did Blanche say?" he asked as Ray came down from the step-ladder.

"What! haven't you heard?" she said, trying to put into her voice the gladness that was lacking in her heart. "That sister of mine is married, Gene ; and father and mother have gone to congratulate her."

"No!" And Gene stared at her as if utterly unable to comprehend her meaning. "You surely are not in earnest, Ray?"

"Yes, I am in earnest," said the girl quietly. "She was married three days ago."

"Married!" he repeated with such a look of hopelessness that all her fears in regard to his feeling for Blanche were instantly confirmed ; and without waiting to answer him, confident that any thing she might say would only add to his pain, she left the room for her hat and shawl.

"Married!" he said over and over to himself, convinced that his last chance of winning Ray was gone, — for he had clung to the hope that Blanche would some time come back, and win Donald to herself again, — and he was still leaning on the casement with that despondent look in his face, when Ray returned, equipped for the woods.

It was one of those rare Indian-summer days that sometimes come in mid-November, as if Autumn, turning for a last look, had tossed to her lovers a farewell kiss from the tips of her nut-brown fingers. The forest-trees had not yet lost their brilliant tints. In the open fields the wild blackberry trailed its scarlet leaves over the dead grasses, and the sumachs stood like acolytes holding their blazing torches; while here and there, like a red-cloaked cardinal, loomed a cedar covered with flaming woodbine. The air was full of aromatic odors, and everywhere on land and sea fell the mellow sunshine. Yesterday Pencroft had noted it all with the sensuous delight of a poet: to-day he walked at Ray's side silent and pre-occupied; and Ray, with her heart full of pity, was silent too.

They were nearing Chestnut Hill when Gene remembered that he had promised his father to leave a message at Peter Rand's, a bed-ridden parishioner living in a little cabin in a bit of woods which they had just passed; and Ray, not being in a mood for visiting the sick, sauntered on, thinking that he would soon overtake her. But Peter Rand was an inveterate talker, and Gene found it a hard matter to

tear himself away. Ray looked back once or twice ; and finding on reaching the foot of the hill that he was not in sight, she was about to seat herself on a fallen tree to wait for him, when she saw Keith coming to meet her.

"Give me your hand, and I will help you up," he said. So, hand in hand, they climbed the somewhat steep ascent, and, having reached the summit, sat down on an old log under the chestnut-trees, from which now and then a belated burr dropped lazily through the shimmering air. For a moment neither of them spoke, but Ray knew as well as if he had put it into words, that Donald was waiting impatiently to hear the latest news from Blanche ; and Donald knew equally well that something was weighing on Ray's mind.

"What is troubling you, puss?" he asked presently.

Ray hesitated. How could she tell him? Yet the sooner it was over, the better.

"I don't know that it is any thing for me to be troubled about, Donald," she said ; "but it is so hard to realize that she is actually married, and to some one whom we have never seen."

"Who?" asked Donald, in a tone that indicated the slightest possible interest.

Again Ray hesitated. She had thought that he would know at once, without her having to speak the name.

"Who is it that she has married?" she asked with conscious hypocrisy ; "the father of the little

girl whom she was teaching. They were married three days ago, and father and mother have gone to make her a visit."

"Whom are you talking about? You don't mean — good God, Ray! you don't mean Blanche?" cried the young man, springing to his feet, with a look in his face that frightened her. It was not the look of hopelessness that she had seen in Gene's face, but one of mingled defiance and despair, — a ghastly, rigid look that chilled her in the midst of the golden sunshine.

"Don't, Donald," she said gently, taking both his hands in hers with a vague fear that he was going mad. But Donald, snatching away his hands, began tramping back and forth, apparently unconscious of her presence, repeating as Gene had done, but in another tone, the one word, "Married!"

Ray, meanwhile, afraid to leave him, and equally afraid to speak, sat watching him sorrowfully. "Surely," she said to herself, "if Blanche had known how he loved her, she could never have been so cruel."

At last he stopped in his savage tramp, and leaned white and spent against the tree beside her.

"So much for woman's love!" he ejaculated. But at sight of Ray's pitiful eyes, his mood changed, and dropping on his knees at her feet he gave way to convulsive sobs. It was not the first time that Ray had seen a strong man shaken with grief; and with instinctive motherliness she drew his head to her knee, and let it rest there till the storm had spent itself.

And this was the tableau that Pencroft saw as he came up the hill. For an instant he stood spell-bound ; then he hastily turned back, and by a slight detour put a heavy thicket between himself and them without having been discovered. The last shadow of uncertainty — the sweet uncertainty, like a filmy cloud with the sunshine piercing through, that had permitted him still to hope — was dissipated ; for, however much infatuated Donald might once have been with Blanche, it was very evident that he had had the good sense to transfer his affections to Ray. And Gene was too thoroughly honest and honorable consciously to covet aught that was his neighbor's, or to be willing to interfere in any way with that neighbor's happiness. He felt that there must be no more readings, and no more music-lessons with Ray sitting by to prompt him. She had grown too dear to him for him to be so constantly near her, knowing beyond a doubt that she belonged to another ; and suddenly he was possessed with an intense desire to get away from Crague.

While he sat there, like Elijah under the juniper-tree, feeling that life was comparatively worthless, he caught sight of Alva Drome and Della ; and, fearing that they might intrude upon the lovers, he sprang down to meet them, and under pretence of having something to show them, — which in reality was nothing but a deserted fish-hawk's nest which he had found on a previous ramble, — he led them to the other side of the hill, and, with one device after another, managed to keep them interested till

Ray and Donald joined them ; and by that time Donald was outwardly himself again, and Ray was able to bid them a cheerful good-morning. They were both unusually quiet, but that was only natural, considering the circumstances, Gene thought ; but had he been less engrossed with his own trouble, he might have seen that the look on Donald's face was not that of a happy lover.

Della and young Drome found them all three dull company ; and the whole party, after strolling about for half an hour in an aimless way, turned homeward in a state of general dissatisfaction. Alva Drome's dissatisfaction, however, arose from the fact that he had come to Crague that morning with the determination not to return to the Neck until he had offered himself to Della, and this early breaking-up bid fair to frustrate his plan ; but having taken the precaution to provide a written declaration in case he should not be able to declare himself by word of mouth, he slipped the letter into her hand on reaching the parsonage gate, and, promising to call in the evening, bade her good-morning.

Della was not in the least surprised. She had been expecting it ever since the day the young man fastened his anchor to her neck-ribbon, for his attentions had been steadily increasing ; but while she herself was disposed to look kindly upon him, she knew that with the rest of the family he was not a favorite, and it was with some trepidation that she submitted his letter to her mother.

Mrs. Pencroft read it with a disturbed face ; and

presently the young woman was summoned to the study, where her father sat at his desk absently dotting the margin of the sermon on which he had been working.

"Have you given this young man any encouragement, daughter?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I have, sir," said Della slowly; "for I think he is very nice."

"Nice!" repeated her father. "It makes no difference how nice he is, if he hasn't brains enough to fit himself for some sort of work. Are you willing to let me answer him for you?"

"What will you tell him, sir?" asked the girl timidly, for her father's voice was waxing stern.

"That he can never marry my daughter until he has made a man of himself. I will give him two years probation."

And this, together with a little fatherly advice, was the answer that young Drome received when he came to the parsonage that evening; the minister himself delivering it.

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS BEST FRIEND.

MRS. KEITH, in her black dress, sat knitting by the west window when Donald returned from Chestnut Hill that November afternoon. On many women a black dress has always a sombre effect, but the radiating cheerfulness of Margaret Keith's face would have relieved sackcloth itself from any suggestion of gloominess. It was like the brightness of the Indian summer, tender and subdued, and no one could come into her presence without a sense of warmth and cheer. Like a heliostat, she possessed the power to bring sunbeams into the darkest places, and prison them there. Even Donald, downcast as he was, felt the charm the moment he entered the room that night; and he went at once and leaned over her chair, and kissed her, as was his habit. He had gone back to the woods after leaving the others, and alone in the solitude had so far mastered himself that one who was not especially interested in him would scarcely have perceived that any thing was amiss; but Mrs. Keith, her mother-love always on the alert, saw at a glance that some fresh trouble was weighing upon him. She asked no

questions, however, knowing that he would tell her when the right time came. Ellis Sloane, a widowed Scotchwoman who had been with her for years in the capacity of housekeeper and companion, had already brought in supper, and they sat down at once; but Donald, though too sensible to refuse to eat, being thoroughly hungry in spite of his grief, made no attempt at conversation, and it was not until he was alone with his mother that his tongue was loosed.

"Blanche is married, mother," he said abruptly, and with his usual directness; "married to a man whom she did not know two months ago. Do you suppose she loves him, mother? Do you think he loves her as a man would love her who had known her all his life?"

Mrs. Keith in her astonishment could not answer him at first. In fact, she could scarcely believe that he had heard the story aright, until he assured her that he had it from Ray's own lips.

"She must have loved him, Donald," she said at last; "and if he did not love her, why should he have wished to marry her?"

"But what is a love worth that springs up like Jonah's gourd?" said Donald contemptuously.

"We must not be hasty in our judgment, Donald," she said gently. "What is done cannot be undone, and it only remains for us to bear our disappointment with a brave heart."

Donald set his teeth together without answering. Even as a child he had not been given to whining

over a hurt, and his mother had no fear of his being unmanned by this trouble.

"But such hurts do not heal in a night," she said sorrowfully to herself as she scanned his gloomy face the next morning at breakfast: "they must bleed themselves out."

There was a gloomy face at the breakfast-table at the parsonage also that Sunday morning.

Della's? No, indeed. Della was looking remarkably bright and cheerful; for, disposed always to take an optimistic view of life, she was confident that Alva would see the wisdom of her father's advice, and begin immediately to act upon it.

It was Eugene's face that was overcast, and little Mrs. Pencroft viewed it with some apprehension.

"I wouldn't have believed that the dear boy cared so much about her," she said to herself. "To be sure, she is a pretty creature, but not just the sort of girl that I'd suppose my Gene would fancy. Poor fellow! I wish his choice had fallen on Ray, — it might have saved him a disappointment, and she is a girl after my own heart. But a young man can't be expected to consult the preferences of his friends, nor even of his mother, in such matters." And while the little woman was carrying on these cogitations, Eugene was pondering on the possibility of his being able to leave Craque. If he had only some reasonable ground for resigning his school, there would be no trouble. He wondered how it would do for him to plead failing health, and the need of a change of air; but one look

in the glass at his hale face and broad shoulders showed that any such plea would be absurdity itself. Then he remembered that only a day or two before he had heard Della wishing that she had a school, and his decision was instantly formed. A course of medical lectures was being delivered in the city which he greatly wanted to hear. He would say this to the directors, and ask them to let him leave the school in Della's hands for a few weeks, — until the holidays, at least, — and by that time he might be able to see more clearly which way duty lay.

But Della received the proposition with an emphatic protest. She could not think of taking a school like that to begin with: the scholars, most of them at least, were too near her own age.

"It is just the right sort," said Gene. "The scholars are thoroughly disciplined, and I am certain that they will respect you enough to be on their good behavior in spite of your youth: at all events, they will if they know that I am coming back."

"You vain creature!" said Della; "as if that would make any difference! It will probably be 'out of sight, out of mind;' and while you are serenely enjoying the lectures, I shall be spending my time in trying to subdue rebellious boys. That dreadful Tommy Crosson, I am sure, will need flogging at least once a week; and as for Sam Winters, I shall expect to have to expel him the first day."

"Now, do be reasonable, Dell, and have pity on me," said Gene. "I haven't heard a lecture for a

year, except such as you and mother give me now and then ; and this course is just what I want, for I hope to take my diploma next spring."

Della heaved a sigh. "If I must, I must," she said pathetically. "Go ask the directors ; and if they don't object, I shall have nothing more to say. But I shall make one stipulation : that, if I do the same work that you have done, I shall receive the same pay."

"Agreed," said Gene, resolving that if the directors demurred against this clause in the contract, he would make up the deficiency from his own pocket. But when the next morning he called on the directors, and stated the case, the fear of losing him altogether led them to accede to his proposition in full, without a dissenting voice.

Ray, in the mean time, was beginning to experience an oppressive sense of loneliness. It was the first time in her life that her father and mother had both been absent at once ; and she wandered about the house feeling deserted and forlorn. Added, too, to her loneliness, and her solicitude concerning Blanche, was a weight of anxiety in regard to Donald and Gene, the knowledge of which, to Gene at least, would have been the sweetest of balm. She had watched them both that day at church from her seat behind the melodeon, and had seen with pain that Donald had a proud, hard look in his face as unlike as possible to the cheerful gravity that was natural to him ; while Gene still wore a dejected air, and seemed to gaze at her as reproachfully

as though she were the cause of all his unhappiness.

"He is unreasonable to blame me for it," she said to herself. "To be sure, I have always felt that Donald had the stronger claim to her; but I would have been perfectly satisfied to have her marry either of them, instead of that dreadful Otis Gilderman. I don't like the name, and I know I sha'n't like the man." And then, remembering that she was in church, she resolved to dismiss these worldly thoughts, and fix her mind on the sermon. But though Mr. Pencroft preached with more than his usual eloquence that day, he was unable to hold her attention. In less than five minutes after her good resolve, her thoughts had travelled to the city, and she found herself wondering what her father and mother were doing, and how long they would be gone, and whether or not Blanche was happy in her new home; and by the time her truant thoughts had returned to Crague, Mr. Pencroft was giving out the closing hymn.

Della came to her as soon as the services were over, and asked her to go home with her to lunch, saying in a whisper that she had a secret to tell her. Ray accepted the invitation with pleasure. But, while she was shaking hands with other friends, Gene, fearing a premature revelation of his plans, managed to get near enough to Della to enjoin silence on the subject: consequently Ray did not hear the promised secret until the following evening, when the young man himself walked in, and told

her abruptly that he had come to say good-by for an indefinite length of time. It had never occurred to her, that Blanche's marriage was likely to affect herself in any way; it had never occurred to her, that these idyllic days, with the reading and the music and the pleasant walks and talks, could not, like the poet's river, "go on forever:" and while she was not conscious of caring more for Gene than for Donald, she knew that Gene's going would leave a great void in her daily life. Still, it was a fine opportunity for the young student, and she felt that she ought to congratulate him. But Gene himself did not seem very glad about it.

"I suppose nothing will make him glad just now," she thought sadly, as she held out her hand; for Gene had risen to go.

"I wonder if you will miss me," he said, at the same time wondering within himself whether or not Donald would care if he should touch his lips to the hand he had prisoned in his own.

"O Gene! we shall all miss you," she said with a quivering chin. And Gene, without stopping to wonder any more, pressed a kiss on the dear hand, and was gone; carrying with him the vision of a slender girl in a gray gown, with a look of gentle regret in her brown eyes as she held up the lamp to light him down the steps. As for the girl, turning back and closing the door, she stood a moment with downcast eyes, gazing curiously on the hand he had kissed; and then, with a quick shy movement, she lifted it to her lips. But Gene, not being a clair-

voyant, lost the pretty companion-piece, and went away thinking Donald a happy man.

Ray had hoped that she might see him again ; but the young man would not trust himself to the ordeal of a second parting, and the only additional farewell she had was the flutter of a white handkerchief the next morning from the stage window. Donald came in for a moment in the afternoon, ostensibly to bring her some curious specimens of chrysalides, but in reality, as Ray knew very well, to learn what further news had been received from Blanche. Gene's departure had greatly surprised him ; but while, like Ray, he attributed it to his disappointment in regard to Blanche, he could not quite comprehend why he had chosen to go to the city, unless for the purpose of being near her in case she needed a friend. And if Gene could do this for her, why could he not do the same ?

Ray had just received a letter from her father ; but it brought no news, merely saying that they had arrived safely, that Blanche was well, and that they expected to return on Saturday.

" I suppose it isn't natural for a man to go into particulars," she said apologetically, with a vague fear that her father had not found the " particulars " altogether satisfactory ; " but on Saturday we shall hear all the news," she added. " It will not be long to wait, yet I am so impatient that it seems an interminable length of time."

Donald looked down at her with fatherly gravity, as from a higher plane of experience, thinking that

if she had before her the prospect of a lifetime of waiting, she would learn to curb her impatience; but he merely said, "Take good care of your chrysalides, and you will have some butterflies by and by," and went away, still clinging to the forlorn hope that Blanche had only been trying to hoax them.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHANGED PLAN.

FOUR days are relatively four very small fragments of time, but Ray had never before known days so long and lonely. She filled up the hours with every possible variety of occupation, and still the time dragged. As for eating, it seemed a farce to sit down to the table morning, noon, and night, with those vacant places staring at her, and she was often disposed to excuse herself; but Dido, feeling that for the present she was the guardian of her young mistress's health and happiness, insisted that she should adhere strictly to the established routine of meals.

"Dar ain't nuffin like eatin' reg'lar to keep up yer healf an' sperrits, honey," she said, in reply to Ray's repeated declaration that she was not hungry; "eatin' unreg'lar-like discomboberates de hull ob de internal apparatuses, an' upsots de congestion gen'ally."

And having laid down this hygienic law, Dido took good care to see that it was not neglected. Three times a day the table was set with scrupulous care; and whenever Ray showed a serious lack of

appetite, the faithful creature would put her wits to work to surprise her into a laugh, and, that being accomplished, she had no more fears.

“Laffin’ am anudder powerful mighty help to de congestion, chile. Enybody dat kin get up a reg’lar shake-down laf ain’t likely ebber to hab de dyspepsic.” And Ray laughed and ate in spite of herself, and managed to get through the week without going into a decline.

Still, the moment papa Braddington stepped from the stage on Saturday afternoon, he saw that his little girl’s face had lost something of its wonted brightness. Mrs. Braddington saw only the old brown cottage, which in her estimation gained nothing by contrast with Mrs. Gilderman’s elegant house; and truly, in the harsh light of the November gloaming, with the dead vines clinging disconsolately to the lattice, and the brown leaves eddying in the garden walks and wandering like nestless birds back and forth on the windy lawn, the old place did look somewhat dreary. But while Mrs. Braddington was drawing disparaging comparisons, and bemoaning her unhappy fate in being compelled to return to Crague, her husband was congratulating himself on being again at home.

“It seems good to be back in my old place,” he said, as with a satisfaction akin to that of a Chinese philosopher on getting back to his own teacup, he settled into his leather-covered arm-chair in the library; noting, with no diminution of satisfaction, that every thing on his desk remained just as he

had left it, even to the half-written sheet under the paper-weight. "Cities, I suppose, are necessary evils, and consequently it is well that there are people who are content to inhabit them; but for myself, girlie, I am very thankful that I am not compelled to live in a crowd, and that I have this little corner where I can work in quiet."

"Gene would hardly agree with you, father. He says he needs the stimulus of other minds," said Ray. "He has gone to the city to attend a course of medical lectures, and will not be back till the holidays."

"Indeed!" said her father in some surprise: "I am glad of that. He is studying under difficulties, and the lectures will do him good. But we shall miss him, dear," he added; the thought suddenly occurring to him, that possibly Ray's loss of color might be due to Gene's absence.

"Yes, indeed!" said Ray quickly; "but, papa, he is half heart-broken about Ban."

At the mention of Blanche, Mr. Braddington sighed, and turned wearily to his desk; and Ray, though anxious to ask him about her, kissed him quietly, and went to help her mother take off her wraps.

"What *do* you and your father find to talk about?" were the first words that greeted her. "Here I have been sitting all this time, and not a soul to wait on me. Do take off my arctics. I dare say your father has been filling your head with all sorts of ridiculous things about Blanche."

"He has not even spoken of her, mamma," said Ray, as she knelt to take off the overshoes. "Do tell me about her, please. Is she well and happy? And is Mr. Gilderman a good man?"

"Why do you want to ask such a question as that?" said her mother angrily. "Do you suppose your sister would have married him if he was not a good man? You and your father have so many absurd notions! Mr. Gilderman is a charming man, and his house is perfect. I wish you could see the carpets and the statues and pictures. And he was very polite to us. I dare say he would have invited me to stay till the holidays, if your father had not said explicitly that we must go home on Friday. I told Blanche that I had no intention of returning so soon; but Mr. Gilderman had made arrangements to go to Boston to spend Sunday, and expected her to go with him; and rather than interrupt their plans, as it would not have been pleasant for me to stay there alone with the servants, I decided to come home, and to go again by and by."

She did not think it necessary to say that Blanche had not urged her staying, but Ray knew it all as well as if her mother had put it into words.

"Come, do take this heavy shawl," said Mrs. Braddington impatiently; for Ray, after removing the arctics, had remained kneeling at her mother's feet, too eager to hear about Blanche to remember that there was any thing more to be done.

"But when is she coming to make us a visit?" asked the girl, as she folded the shawl.

"Not till we are better prepared to see them than we are at present, I hope," said her mother. "I should be positively ashamed to have Mr. Gilderman see how we have to live."

"Why should we be ashamed, mamma? We live as well as we can afford to live; and, if Mr. Gilderman is a gentleman, he will not love Ban any the less because the carpets are faded and the house and furniture somewhat antiquated. If I married a prince, I should want him to see my home, if it were nothing but a log cabin."

"That is another of your ridiculous fancies," said her mother. "You don't know any thing about men, my dear. A man like Mr. Gilderman, who has always lived magnificently, and been accustomed to have servants to wait upon him, and horses and carriages at his command, would simply be disgusted to find himself in such surroundings as these, and would feel that he lowered himself in marrying into a family that lived so plainly."

"Then, mamma, I hope never to meet him," said Ray hotly, as she laid the folded shawl in the wardrobe; and, seeing nothing more to be done for her mother, she ran up to her own room, and threw herself down by the window in a passion of indignation.

But there was not time to indulge her feelings, for tea was waiting; and presently she so far conquered her anger that she was able to put on a cheerful face, and even succeeded in beguiling her father into temporary forgetfulness of Blanche with her ex-

tended account of all that had taken place at home during his absence.

In the evening Donald came, waiting for her in the dining-room under pretence of having a new ornithological specimen to show her; but the moment she entered he forgot all pretence, and snatching her hands in a vise-like grasp he looked down at her with questioning eyes.

"Is it true?" he asked huskily: "is it all true, Ray?"

"Yes, it is true," she answered quietly: "she is married, and seems to be very happy."

"Happy!" he repeated, tightening his grasp till Ray could scarcely keep from crying out with pain: "do you believe that, Ray? Do you believe it is possible for her to be happy?"

He leaned forward as he spoke, his gray eyes burning like sloes under the beetling brows, and his hair falling in a disorderly mass above them.

"She says she is happy, Donald, and that ought to satisfy us," she replied, her heart sinking at the sight of his stormy face.

"But you are not satisfied," he said savagely; "neither am I." And with that he dropped her hands, and hurried away.

She longed to call him back, and try in some way to comfort him. But what could she do? what could she say? And with a sorrowful sense of her inability to help him she looked out into the moonlight, and watched him striding down the orchard path.

"O Ban, Ban, what misery you have made!" she said to herself, turning from the window as he disappeared in the gloom.

"Mother," said the young man that night, walking in white and haggard, "I am going to follow Gene's example; that is, if you can spare me for a time."

Spare him! Mrs. Keith put up her hand as if warding off a blow. She had been trying for years to reconcile herself to the fact that some time she would have to spare him; but this was so sudden, so unexpected. Still, she had no opposition to offer; and Donald, pacing the room moody and self-absorbed, did not see her blanched face.

He had as yet no definite plan of action, only a fierce desire to get away from every thing associated with his trouble, — the farther away the better; and for this reason he had abandoned all thought of going to the city. Eugene might find it possible to remain there, but for him it would be madness. The most feasible thing that presented itself was an extended tour for scientific research throughout the Southern and Western States. He had long been wishing to undertake something of the kind; and, having once decided upon it, he began his preparations with characteristic promptness. Mrs. Keith entered into the plan with cheerful acquiescence, and when the time came for him to start she went through the ordeal of saying good-by with unfaltering lips. But the stage had scarcely turned the first corner when the young man heard his name

called ; and, looking out, he saw old Ellis flying down the road.

“Coom bock, Meester Donal’!” she cried with frantic gestures. “Coom bock! The mistress is deeing.” And hastening to the house, he found his mother stretched on the floor in a deathlike swoon. Then he knew what the parting had cost her, and his plans were instantly changed. To go on with them at such a price was an impossibility; and when late in the afternoon Mrs. Keith opened her eyes from the troubled sleep that had followed her swoon, she beheld him seated near her, book in hand, with nothing to indicate that he had had any thought of taking a journey.

“What! back so soon?” she said in surprise.

“Yes, and back for good,” he answered, smiling gravely. And after an ineffectual attempt on her part to convince him that her illness was not serious enough to detain him, the subject was dropped.

CHAPTER XV.

A SPECK IN THE SKY.

BLANCHE, to do her justice, had been heartily glad to see her father and mother, to show them her handsome house, and to introduce to them her husband and little Bessie; but she had no desire to urge them to prolong the visit. Mr. Gilderman was not fond of company, and she saw plainly before the week was half gone that he was beginning to feel bored. Consequently she was deaf to all her mother's hints in regard to a longer stay. Mr. Braddington, after satisfying himself that the marriage was a fixed fact, having attended to the few business matters that required his attention, and paid his respects to uncle John and aunt Rachel, was ready to return home at once; but his wife was not disposed to shorten her visit to suit his pleasure, and even on Friday afternoon it was with manifest reluctance that she began her preparations for the journey. Blanche, knowing that she was disappointed, made an effort to smooth it over by promising to send for her by and by to spend a month; and it was only the anticipation of this event that reconciled her to going back to Crague.

"Poor mamma!" said Blanche soothingly, to her own conscience. "Of course I should be glad to have her stay if things were different; but mamma is peculiar, and Mr. Gilderman is peculiar, and it would have been useless for me to try to harmonize them."

Blanche's experience in discovering that her husband was "peculiar" was not, perhaps, unlike the experience of the majority of wives. Yet, except on rare occasions, Mr. Gilderman was an exceedingly agreeable man. Few could be more suave and gracious when it suited his humor; and he loved Blanche as sincerely as a thoroughly selfish nature would permit. At their brief meeting on Cliff Haven Beach he had been fascinated with her grace and beauty; and the finding, a few months later, that the lovely stranger was his daughter's music-teacher, had been a pleasure too great to put into words. He knew that he had no right to ask her to marry him: he was nearly twice her age, and there was a carefully hidden fact in his history that debarred him, as an honorable man, from offering his love to any woman; but he was like the connoisseur who discovers a rare painting, and is seized with a desire to possess it. He wanted the sweetness of her presence, the witchery of her bloom and brightness, always near him; and no one could question his right to invite her to become his daughter's governess. But before she had been a month under his roof, in spite of his predetermination to do nothing of the kind, he had asked her to become his

wife, and, with what seemed to her a genuine lover's haste, insisted on their being married at once.

It was easy for one who had so long been accustomed to have her own way, to quiet her conscience in regard to her father and mother. If she wrote to them beforehand, it would make a useless delay; and very possibly they might insist on her going home to be married, and that was not to be thought of. Mr. Gilderman no doubt loved her, but she had not enough faith in him to believe that for her sake he would love her home and her friends. Besides, there was an air of romance about the whole affair that she thoroughly enjoyed.

The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Josiah Corliss, the pastor of a small church in the suburbs of the city, with Mrs. Josiah Corliss and her daughter for witnesses; and it was all so quickly over that Blanche found herself at home, with Bessie clinging to her hand, before she could fairly realize that she was Mrs. Otis Gilderman.

"Please let me kiss you, you are so beautiful to-night," said the child, as Blanche threw off her wraps and gave them to Lena, the maid; "and tell me where you have been, please," she entreated, as Blanche lifted the little face between her palms and kissed it on either cheek. "If you went to a party, what made you come home so soon?"

Her father drew her to his knee.

"We have been to a wedding, Bessie," he said gently; "and your 'Bannie' is now your mamma."

The child snatched away her hand with an angry flash in her eyes.

"She is *not* my mamma," she cried, stamping her little foot. "She is nice and beautiful, but she is not my *mamma*, my own precious mamma;" and, breaking into piteous weeping, she fled from the room.

"Let me go comfort her," said Blanche, greatly troubled by this unlooked-for outburst: "I will not stay long." And a few moments later, having changed the pearl-colored silk for a white wrapper, she tapped at the child's door. Getting no answer, she turned the handle, and went in. Bessie had thrown herself on the bed, and was still sobbing.

"Bessie, darling, don't you love me?" she said, laying her cool hand on the child's forehead.

"Yes, I love you; but I can't have you for my mamma," Bessie answered with a long-drawn sigh.

"You need not call me mamma, darling," said Blanche. "You can call me your Bannie still, and you will be still my little Bessie."

"But I want my own mamma," said the child, with another burst of tears.

"Some time, perhaps, you will have her again," said Blanche, who, though she had never bestowed much thought on the subject of the recognition of friends in heaven, was anxious to give the child some present comfort; "but now you must be bright and happy for papa's sake. Come, let me help you undress, dear, and we will not call Lena." And with gentle hands Blanche unrobed the little

creature, and then sang to her till she dropped asleep.

Gilderman, hearing the singing, followed the sound till he stood at the door, his slippered feet moving noiselessly on the soft tapestry; and as he saw Blanche, in her white wrapper, leaning over his child's pillow, he was smitten with momentary humility and remorse. But it is a hard matter for the good angel to make itself heard in a thoroughly selfish heart; and Otis Gilderman was selfish to the core.

"She is mine," he said savagely, in answer to the silent voice, "and death alone shall part us." And Blanche, coming from the room a moment later, found herself imprisoned in his arms.

"Did you succeed?" he asked, as Blanche lifted a finger to warn him not to waken Bessie.

"We compromised," she said in a whisper; and so the little cloud that had threatened to overshadow her happiness, so far as Bessie was concerned, disappeared in an hour, Bessie never again alluding to the subject.

The servants received the announcement of the marriage with no manifestation of surprise, having evidently expected it; and by the time Mr. and Mrs. Braddington arrived, all the wheels in the domestic machinery were moving with the harmony and regularity of a long-established household.

At last, Blanche felt, she had attained her highest ambition. She had a palatial home, perfect in all its appointments, an admiring and devoted hus-

band, and an allowance that enabled her to revel in long-desired luxuries. What more could she ask?

The most serious drawback to her happiness was the lack of fashionable acquaintances. She had supposed, from the style in which he lived, that Mr. Gilderman would have an extensive visiting-list, and was both surprised and annoyed to find that none but the nearest neighbors called. When she learned, however, that though he had long been established in business in the city, he had been but two years a resident, she accepted it as a sufficient explanation; but, at the same time, she mentally resolved to enlarge the circle as rapidly as possible.

Mrs. Hedgway came in often in a friendly way, feeling it still her duty to keep a motherly watch over the young creature who had so recklessly taken the reins of destiny into her own hands; and Blanche, though she always received her cordially, smiled to herself at her solicitude, and called her "a dear old fudge."

One day, while she was dressing to go out, the door-bell rang, and a servant brought up Eugene Pencroft's card. She had expected him, for Ray, a fortnight before, had written that he was in town; and, somewhat nettled that he had not called sooner, she resolved to treat him with coolness. But she found Gene's manner as cool and distant as her own, while the half-scornful smile that curved his lips as he glanced over her elaborate costume made her wish, for the moment, that she had on aingham gown.

"You are well and happy, I trust, Mrs. Gilderman," he said, touching frigidly the hand she extended to him.

"Quite so, thank you," she replied, seating herself in one of the straight-backed reception-chairs; and after they had filled up ten or fifteen minutes with an interchange of equally commonplace remarks, the young man bowed himself out.

In some way he had conceived the idea that Blanche had sacrificed herself for the good of the family; and he had come to the house with a feeling of pity underlying all his scorn and resentment, and ready to adopt her colors, and avow himself her knight-errant. But this fashionably-attired, self-complacent woman needed no commiseration. On the contrary, she evidently expected to be congratulated; and it did not occur to him until he had left the house, that he had altogether omitted that important duty. On the whole, he was not sorry. Yet why should he not congratulate her? She was satisfied, and that ought to satisfy her friends. He had taken an early opportunity to call at the publishing house of Otis Gilderman & Co.; and, while apparently absorbed in examining the latest musical publications, he had subjected the head of the firm to a critical inspection. "Selfish and domineering," was his private verdict, as he studied his face, and listened to the dictatorial voice in which he gave his orders to the clerks; but when he saw him look up with a smile, and toss a handful of pennies to a little match-pedler who had made her way to his

desk, he modified this opinion somewhat, for Gene was not inclined to judge any one uncharitably, and he did not, perhaps, take into consideration the fact that a man newly married to a young and beautiful girl would naturally feel kindly disposed toward the whole world, match-venders included. Blanche had cordially asked him to call again, but at present he had no wish to avail himself of the invitation. In truth, he found but little time for social visits. He had come to the city for self-culture as well as for self-discipline, and he meant to make the most of the opportunity; for though he had spent two years at a medical college, and had been studying faithfully ever since leaving it, he felt that he was not yet ready for work.

Ray, with the rest of his Crague friends, had supposed that he would be at home at the holidays; but Della came in one afternoon, flurried and dismayed, to say that he was going to start at once for Europe, an invalid uncle having invited him to go with him to be gone a year; and the school directors had asked her to keep the school until his return.

"I don't know what I am to do!" she said despairingly. "The scholars, thinking he was so soon to be back, have been on their good behavior, and have done beautifully; but if they know that he is not to be home for a year, I shall never be able to manage them. It is shameful, too, for him to go without a parting word to any of us."

But Gene agreeably disappointed them all by running down at the last moment to say good-by,

unable to take himself off for so long an absence without one more look at the home faces.

Necessarily, however, his farewells were brief, for he had but a day's furlough; and Della could get no opportunity to enter her protest. When he went to take leave of the Braddingtons, he found Donald there, giving Ray directions in regard to the arrangement of a case of moths and butterflies; and, though the girl's eyes filled with tears as she gave him her hand at parting, he went away more firmly convinced than ever that Donald had possession of her heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE BREAKERS.

THE time of the singing of birds had come again, and the world was "girded with gladness." On the lawns there was a shimmering glory of green and gold, while the orchards showed a wilderness of snowy bloom with here and there a peach-tree glowing warm and rosy against the white background. Crocuses and daffodils had, weeks ago, broken through the garden-sod; and along the wood-paths the waxen bells of the trailing arbutus were blossoming joyously among the old year's dead leaves. Few of the housekeepers of Crague, however, could take time to enjoy this beauty; for already the sound of the tack-hammer, and the vigorous flagellations of the carpet-beater, drowned "the voice of the turtle," and the smell of paint and varnish mingled with the fragrance of lilacs and apple-blossoms.

It was a busy time for Ray Braddington. Blanche was expected home this summer, — an expectation in which all the interests of the family centred; and Ray was determined, if possible, to renovate the whole house. New carpets and fresh upholstery

were out of the question ; for though the firm of Otis Gilderman & Co. stood ready to publish whatever Mr. Braddington chose to send them, — not because he was Mr. Otis Gilderman's father-in-law, but because his music was appreciated by the public, and found a ready sale, — the income was not yet sufficient to go far beyond the daily needs of the household ; but paper and paint and whitewash cost but a trifle, and, with the help of Silas and Dido, the young housekeeper wrought wonders. The little dining-room was hung with new paper, cheap but neat and cheerful ; and the furniture was revarnished, and covered with fresh chintz. No small share of the work she did with her own hands, applying the paint and varnish herself where she could not trust to Silas Crane's clumsy manipulations, and spending hours on her knees, darning and patching the carpets. It took weeks to accomplish it ; and the June roses were thrusting their saucy faces through the lattice, and in at the open casement, before she felt that she could rest from her labors.

“ And what does it all amount to, now that it is done ? ” said her mother, as Ray, with a well-earned feeling of satisfaction, surveyed her work. “ Every thing in the house looks as if it might have come out of the ark.”

“ But it is the best we can do, mamma,” said Ray, feeling as if her mother had dashed a pitcher of cold water into her face. “ Every thing is neat and whole, and clean as wax ; and Blanche will not expect any thing more.”

"Of course not, poor child! She knows it would be of no use; and I dare say she is dreading the thought of bringing Mr. Gilderman here."

"Then, mamma, she can leave him at home. It is Ban herself, and not Mr. Gilderman, that we want to see," cried Ray angrily, as she stepped out on the narrow veranda that connected with the library.

"Is my little girl tired, or is she sighing for new worlds to conquer?" asked her father, as she walked into his sanctum, her face flushed and her lips compressed.

"Only sighing to conquer myself, papa," said Ray, vexed that she had even for a moment lost patience with "poor mamma."

Papa understood.

"That is what I have been trying to do for twenty years, — to conquer myself," he said, putting his arm about her as she nestled down at his side, and laid her head on his shoulder.

"But it is so hard, papa, when things are as they are, and can't be any different," she said, stifling a sob with a laugh.

"Let's go take a walk, deary," he said, pushing back the music-sheets; and as soon as Ray could get her hat, they were off for a stroll on the shore.

Meanwhile, the city housekeepers were sympathizing to some extent with their country sisters; for not even in town can the semi-annual ordeal of house-cleaning be escaped. But very little did Mrs. Otis Gilderman trouble herself about it. She

had enough else to occupy her; and while Mrs. Betts the housekeeper daily marshalled her forces, and directed the attack, she devoted the time to doing her summer shopping. Blanche belonged to that class of women to whom shopping seems to be in some measure a compensation for the loss of Eden; and the novelty of having unlimited means at her command made the occupation a daily delight. It was such luxury to stand at counters loaded with silks and laces and embroideries, and know that she need not stint herself in choosing from them. And in the midst of her plenty she was generous enough to remember those at home.

"Ray shall have a brown silk again," she said to herself, "and mamma a new black one. We'll astonish Crague for once."

But suddenly all her pleasant plans were changed. Out of the serene and cloudless sky a thunderbolt shot down, revealing a yawning chasm at her feet.

It was the Saturday previous to the time set for her going home. She had been all the morning superintending the packing of her trunks; and after lunch, feeling too tired to ride, she let Bessie go without her, and, taking a book, threw herself on a sofa in the library, a great cool room overlooking a terraced garden. The house was very quiet: the noise from the street came to her in a subdued and muffled way; not even a fly buzzed against the window; and the faint breeze that stirred the filmy curtains wafted to her the mingled fragrance of the roses and heliotropes blooming on the parterre. It

was a sleep-compelling atmosphere; and she was fast losing consciousness, when a step in the hall aroused her.

"Bessie must have left the outer door ajar," she said to herself; and, knowing that all the servants were down-stairs, she sprang up to see who had entered. At the same moment the library door opened; and she found herself face to face with a pale, slight woman, whose only beauty was a pair of large soft eyes, — eyes so like Bessie's that Blanche involuntarily put out her hand with a feeling of recognition, with a feeling, too, that the stranger was a lady.

"Where is my husband?" asked a quick, sweet voice. "They told me he was here."

"There is some mistake, I think," said Blanche pleasantly.

"I am sure this is the place," said the lady; "but of course he would not be at home at this hour. I am afraid he will not know me, for he has not seen me for four years. I was ill, and in my delirium I wandered away; and when reason returned, I found myself in an asylum. They thought me crazy, and refused to believe my story, and I have been there ever since; but I am not crazy, and yesterday I made my escape. I could not live any longer without my husband and child."

At that moment Bessie came dancing in.

"Oh, my, Ban, I have had so lovely a ride!" she exclaimed; but on seeing that Blanche was not alone, she checked herself.

"My darling! my darling! don't you know me?" implored the stranger, leaning toward her.

At the sound of her voice the child started, gave her one swift look, and, with a glad cry, sprang into the outstretched arms.

"Mamma! mamma! It is my own precious mamma! They tried to make me think you were dead, but I knew you would come back some day to see your Bessie."

Dizzy and bewildered, Blanche caught at the nearest chair for support. It was all plain to her now, — Bessie's persistent clinging to the memory of her mother; and though she had never fainted in her life, for a moment every thing grew dark about her. But pride came to her help. This woman should not see her stricken down at her feet, neither should Bessie witness her humiliation; and while they were still too much absorbed in each other to notice her, she fled up-stairs.

There were her trunks, ready for the home-journey on Monday; but home was the last place she wished to see. She longed to hide herself from every one who knew her; and seizing her hat and mantle, she rushed into the street. Her first mad impulse was to reach the river, and throw herself in. But before she had gone three blocks, an angel of deliverance met her in the form of Mrs. Hedgway. Blanche would have passed her without speaking, trusting that the heavy veil with which she had masked herself would prevent recognition; but Mrs. Hedgway's quick eyes were not to be deceived.

"Where are you going in such haste, my dear?" she asked, putting out her hand and compelling her to stop.

"Don't ask me, Mrs. Hedgway!" she cried, trying to shake off the detaining hand. "O Mrs. Hedgway, please let me go!"

But Mrs. Hedgway, seeing that she was in trouble, only tightened her kindly hold.

"Come home with me, dear, and tell me all about it," she said entreatingly.

"You can't help me, Mrs. Hedgway. No one can help me; and you will all say that it is my just punishment because I would not listen to advice. And I know it, I know it; but oh, it is more than I can bear!"

"No, no, my child! The dear Lord never lays a feather's weight more on his children than they are able to bear," was Mrs. Hedgway's gentle answer.

"But I am not his child," said Blanche bitterly. "I am an outcast, with no husband and no home, and it does not matter what becomes of me."

"Let us walk on," said Mrs. Hedgway quietly; and, taking Blanche's arm, she drew her into a cross street. Close at hand was a public hall, where a meeting of some sort was in progress; and Mrs. Hedgway at once engaged one of the cabs in waiting.

"Take us to No. — on — Street," she said to the driver, having, with no small amount of urging, induced Blanche to enter; and until they reached her

own door she asked no questions, but she kept the girl's hand in her motherly clasp.

"Now tell me all about it," she said, when at last she had her to herself. And, with sobs and sighs between, Blanche told her sorrowful story.

"Oh, it is cruel, cruel!" said Mrs. Hedgway. "How could he deceive you so? But are you sure there is no mistake?"

"How can there be any mistake? Bessie certainly would know her own mother," said Blanche hopelessly. "No, it is all true, and there is nothing left for me to live for."

"There is always something to live for, dear, while life is spared," her friend replied. "Your life is not necessarily spoiled because a bad man has deceived you. Just now it looks very dreary, I know; but it is from the ruins of the castles of youth that the wise build chapels for after-years."

Blanche shook her head despairingly. Her beautiful castle was forever shattered, and it did not seem to her possible that any thing could be builded of its ruins.

"Oh, if Ray were only here!" she said wearily.

"I will write to her this instant if you will promise to do nothing till she comes," said Mrs. Hedgway.

Blanche, with a desolate sigh, gave the desired promise, and threw herself back on the sofa with closed eyes, while Mrs. Hedgway sat down at once at her desk, and began to write.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAD-SEA APPLES.

THE receipt of Mrs. Hedgway's letter at Gullnest the following Monday was a serious disappointment to the family, and made an abrupt change in all their plans and anticipations. The message was very brief; Mrs. Hedgway merely saying that she wrote at Blanche's request to ask Ray to come to her, as circumstances were such as to make it impossible for Mr. Gilderman to accompany her home, and she did not feel able to take the journey alone.

"Something is wrong," Ray said anxiously to herself; but aloud she said, with forced cheerfulness, "So we have had our worry for nothing, after all, mamma, since Mr. Gilderman is not coming."

"Yes; and I don't imagine Blanche is in the least sorry that it happens so," said her mother. "But I don't see why in the world she sent for you. She could have brought her maid with her for an escort."

"But if she is not well, mamma, she would naturally prefer to have some one besides a servant with her."

"I think I ought to go with you, daughter," said Mr. Braddington, more troubled than he was willing to admit.

"I don't think it will be necessary, papa," said Ray, with an uncomfortable certainty that Blanche had some weightier reason for sending for her than appeared on the surface.

"Dear me! why will people be so fickle?" said Mrs. Braddington, in a fretful voice. "Here we are, all ready and waiting, and now there's no telling when they will come."

"Oh, yes, mamma!" said Ray brightly; "unless Mr. Gilderman can make it convenient to accompany her soon, I shall try to persuade her to come with me at once. Country air is the best medicine she can have." But brightly as she spoke, it was with a weary heart that she prepared for the journey. There was a mystery about it that she could not solve; and when, at the journey's end, the carriage that had been sent to meet her drew up at Mrs. Hedgway's door, instead of taking her to Mr. Gilderman's, she could scarcely summon courage to pull the bell.

"Dear Mrs. Hedgway, what is it?" she asked anxiously; Mrs. Hedgway, who had been watching for her, meeting her at the threshold. But before the answer came, she caught sight of a pale face, sorrowful and heavy-eyed, leaning over the balustrade.

"O Ban! my precious Ban!" she cried, flying up-stairs, and throwing her arms about her. And Mrs. Hedgway, glad to be spared the recital, hastily withdrew.

A week later Blanche's baby was born.

Ray's indignation against the man who had wrecked her sister's happiness was like a fire in her veins: yet when Mrs. Hedgway laid the child in her strong young arms, she did what any other true woman would have done, — covered its face with kisses, and cooed and crooned a welcome. Such greeting is every baby's birthright; and, thank God, there is rarely lacking some motherly soul to bestow it. No child could go unloved when Ray was near; and this one she took to her inmost heart, feeling, in her unworldliness and simplicity, that it was the truest blessing that could have come to Blanche: with all her grief the poor girl would still have something to live for. And that evening she wrote to her father and mother, telling them, in the most matter-of-fact way possible, of the arrival of the baby, as if it were the sweetest bit of news in the world, and that they might look for them as soon as Blanche was able to travel. The rest of the story she kept to tell them by word of mouth; trusting that by the time it became necessary for them to know all, the little one would have made for itself a place in its grandmother's heart. So far as grandpa Braddington was concerned, she was not afraid: it would have no lack of love from him.

But Blanche found it impossible to be reconciled to the fact of the little one's existence: it was all so different from what she had anticipated.

"Don't talk to me of going home!" she said, one day, when Ray began to plan for the journey. "There is nothing for me to do but to hide myself away where none of them can find me."

"That would not help matters, dear," said Ray gently; "and it would be running away from duty. You have only to tell the simple truth, and no one at home will love you any the less."

But it was the thought of home, of Crague, that appalled her. To the rest of the world she was comparatively indifferent; but how could she bear the reproaches that she knew her mother would heap upon her, the look of sorrow in her father's face, the comments of the people whom she had despised? All this was inevitable. Even Sally Decker would have the right to pity her; and while she cowered at the thought of it, she was forced to admit that it was only her "just desert."

"Poor Sally is avenged," she said remorsefully.

Ray made no answer; and after a moment's silence Blanche spoke again, —

"I could bear it better if it were not for taking baby with me. Poor little outlaw! I wish I could give him away to some one who would be kind to him."

"Then give him to me," said Ray, tightening her arms about the little "bundle of possibilities." "O Ban! I am ashamed of you. No woman has a right to put away her child, however unwelcome it may be; and don't you see, dear, that as long as you have him, you have something noble and beautiful to live for?"

But Blanche turned away, and buried her face in the pillow. Life had suddenly become to her an utter desolation, and as yet she could only sit and

weep amid the ruins. It was inexpressibly sad to Ray to see her so hopeless and depressed, and her own inability to comfort her made it doubly hard to bear. For herself, her steadfast, childlike faith served to keep her heart quiet and strong, and she longed to share the talisman with Blanche; but, young as she was, she had already learned the lesson of the old legend, that, while those who have themselves eaten of the apples of the Hesperides may show them to others, they cannot pluck them for them. She could point Blanche to the tree of life, but she could not give her of its fruit; that she must gather for herself: and to Blanche, in her present state of mind, it was less to be desired than the apples that had turned to ashes in her hand. While surrounded with the splendor and luxury that she had so long coveted, she had felt no need nor desire for any thing better; and now that she was so ruthlessly deprived of them, her heart was mad with hate and bitterness toward the man who had robbed her of the right ever to expect such happiness again.

One day there was an imperative ring at the door. Ray in her white wrapper, and with her long hair — the braiding of which had been delayed in one way and another all the morning — floating in a dusky cloud about her shoulders, was coming down the stairs at the moment the chambermaid answered the bell; and, hearing a man's voice asking for Mrs. Gilderman, she stopped midway, breathless with apprehension. Seeing her, the girl ran up and handed her the visitor's card. She read the name half

audibly, "Otis Gilderman," and crushed the card in her hand.

"I will see him, Nancy," she said in an under-tone. "It will not be necessary to disturb my sister." And, flying like a winged Nemesis down the stairs, she threw open the door, and pointed to the street.

"Just a word, one word, with Blanche," he entreated. But Ray neither moved nor spoke; and the man, cowering beneath her indignant young eyes, turned and went down the steps without venturing to open his lips again.

A few days later there was another inquiry at the door for Blanche; but it was in a woman's voice, low and finely modulated.

"She's sick, ma'am, and not able to see any one," said Nancy; but Ray, who chanced to be in the parlor, stepped forward and invited the stranger to come in.

"I am Mrs. — I am little Bessie's mother," she said, changing the form of introduction with a delicacy that Ray was quick to appreciate, "and I want to see Blanche. I want to tell her that I would never have come back if I had known; and I would go away at once, and never trouble them again, if it were not for Bessie, my poor little Bessie!"

She paused with an appealing look into Ray's face.

"Your going away would make no difference, Mrs. Gilderman," said Ray with gentle dignity. "My sister could never go back, no matter what

happened." But gently as she spoke, her guest read her scorn.

"Do not judge my husband too harshly," she said deprecatingly. "He had not seen me since I was taken to the asylum; and he believed me to be incurably insane."

"But that did not make it right," cried the girl passionately. "Oh, it was cruel! cruel!"

"Yes, it was cruel, — cruel to me, and crueler still to her. Oh! I would pray God to let me die, if my dying would repair the wrong."

The soft, clear voice was broken with sobs, and Ray was too near crying to trust herself to reply.

Rising to go, the visitor put out her hand; and Ray, with a yearning desire to comfort her, stooped and kissed the sorrowful face. Neither of them spoke again, but Ray held the hand she had taken until they reached the street door.

"God help us all!" she moaned, turning back to the parlor to regain composure before going to Blanche. "God help us all! What wretchedness one bad man has made!"

Blanche, when at last the girl found courage to return to her, listened to the account of Mrs. Gilderman's visit with a stony face.

"She, poor woman, is not to blame," said Ray gently.

But Blanche, though admitting this to be true, was conscious in her inmost heart of wishing that the asylum had never unclosed its doors.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SAD HOME-COMING.

THOSE were trying weeks for Mr. Braddington and old Dido; for Mrs. Braddington, missing Ray's gentle ministrations, and feeling that Blanche had grievously slighted her in not inviting her to superintend the nursery, found fault with every thing; and the more they exerted themselves to please her, the more irritable and perverse she grew, till Dido at last lost patience entirely, and declared that it was "no use tryin' to do nuffin right fo' de Missus, nohow! De mo' yo' tries, de mo' she obstreperates; an' I's jes' clean tucked out wid her gwines-on." As for Mr. Braddington, his gentleness and forbearance seemed to Dido little short of a miracle.

"I clar fo' it, I jes' b'lieve Marse Braddington got mo' patience dan Job hisself," said Dido, in confidential confab with Silas Crane. "Ef Job's wife had ben fo'ebber a-peckin' at him de way de Missus pecks at Marsa, togedder wid his biles, dar wouldn't 'a' ben nuffin left ob him by de time his good fortin' kim round agin. But den dar's some folks in dis world dat don't nebber seem to hab no

good fortin' nohow, an' some ob dem saints ob de arth, too."

"I reckon that's the boat I'm in, Dido," said Silas, lowering his eyelids. "There don't much good fortune seem to blow my way."

"Yo'!" said Dido with a contemptuous sniff. "Pity 'bout yo', Mr. Crane. I jes' like to know wat better fortin' yo'd want. Yo's got a good comfatubble home, wid yo' free meals a day, an' scarce enough work to do to keep de blood in yer body in de proper circumlocution. Yo' wouldn't nebber 'preciate no better fortin' ef yo' had 'im, Silas Crane."

"Humph! Don't you s'pose I'd 'preciate a snug craft of my own, in the shape of a house, with a dapper little woman to manage it? But then, I s'pose it's all fore-ordinated," said Silas resignedly.

"Dar ain't no fo'ordinati'n about dat, Mr. Crane. Yo' needn't go to comfatin' yer soul wid no sech lucefernations, w'en yo's jes' yer own self to blame. Yo' mought 'a' had a cabin ob yer own years ago, Silas Crane, ef yo' hadn't spended mo' 'an yo' sated, wid yer chawin' an' smokin' ob dat ebber-lastin' weed."

"Oh! now, Dido, you're too hard on a fellow," drawled Silas. "What did the Lord make it for if it wasn't fore-ordinated to be used?"

"W'at fo' did he make any odder pyson, Mr. Crane?" asked Dido with fine contempt. "Rubob an' arson an' picry? Ain't he made enough dat's sweet an' hulsome to fill yer mouf wid, I'd like to

know? Go 'long wid yer nonsense, Silas Crane! 'Tain't nuffin but yer own wicious taste dat makes yo' want to chaw dat weed; an' yo' can't no mo' frow de blame on de Lord, dan de Missus kin blame him fo' de wiciousness ob her temper dat she's ben a-cultiwatin' eb'ry day ob her life fo' de las' twenty year. 'Clar fo' it, it am mos' a wonder Marse Braddin'ton don't jes' gib up de gose and drown hisself."

"He won't do that while he has Miss Ray. Miss Ray's a compensatory dispensation of Providence," said Silas oracularly. "Talk about good fortune! Why, a man that's got a little gal like her 's got a better fortune 'n a shipload of gold."

"I kin agree wid yo' on dat, Mr. Crane," said Dido heartily; and though he had the hardihood to take out his tobacco-box while she was speaking, modified by his praise of her favorite she let him go in peace.

It was two months from the time Ray left Crague, before Blanche was considered strong enough to return with her; and Blanche herself would gladly have had the journey delayed for two months longer.

"Why can't I die?" she moaned, half ready to murmur because her vigorous young frame refused to succumb.

"Don't talk so, Ban!" cried Ray. "Look at this boy, and think what lovely times we shall have with him at dear old Gullnest, watching him grow. Such a darling as he is!—a real Braddington, grandma'll say," she added, with a feeling of genu-

ine thankfulness that there was not a feature in the baby-face to remind one of Otis Gilderman. "His eyes are like his own blessed grandpa's, and his hair, what there is of it, is like his too."

"Poor grandma! I wouldn't so much mind going home if it were not for her," said Blanche. "I don't suppose she will mean to be unkind, but she will drive a thousand daggers through me for all that; and the worst of it is, to know that I deserve it. O Ray! why didn't father *make* me go home? I should have rebelled, of course, but it would have saved all this trouble. He ought to have put chains on me, and dragged me there."

"But that is not God's way, dear," said Ray. "He shows us the right and the wrong, and leaves us to choose for ourselves." And then, fearful that Blanche would think she was preaching, she made haste to change the subject, saying the most absurd things she could think of, just for the sake of seeing a smile come into her sister's face, but going on steadily, meanwhile, with preparations for the journey.

Mrs. Hedgway went with them to the boat that afternoon, to see them safely off; and when they reached Cliff Haven the next morning, they found aunt Beverly waiting for them in a close carriage.

"The hacks are so apt to be crowded at this season," she said in explanation, after she had taken Blanche and her baby in her arms, and kissed them both, without the slightest reference to the wilfulness that had brought the poor girl to this sad pass.

She urged them to stay till the next day, and Ray, fearing that Blanche's strength might be overtaxed, was inclined to accept her hospitality; but Blanche, having started, was anxious to reach the journey's end, and could not be persuaded to rest by the way. To each of them it was a dreary ride, and "Joshway" Brent's attempts to be sociable met but a faint response. Ray was full of apprehension as to the effect the disclosure might have upon her father and mother; and Blanche's thoughts were divided between dread of the meeting, and vain regrets over the unhappy termination of her rash experiment. Another thought that disturbed her was the contrast between this home-coming and the last. As they passed a certain point, she remembered with a pang that it was here the stage had stopped to take in Gene; but with the pang was mingled a feeling of thankfulness that Gene was in Europe. She would not have been sorry had Donald, too, been absent: but she did not need to trouble herself about him, she thought; he would not be likely to come to offer his sympathy. Yet when the stage drew up at the gate, Donald, with his gun on his shoulder and his dog at his side, was standing in the shadow of the old willow on the corner, waiting for a glimpse of the woman he had loved; the woman whom he still loved with a love which, though held down with a strong hand, refused to die. There is a wonderful tenacity in a first love, when the passion is thoroughly genuine to begin with. It may be reasoned against and fought against, and

held constantly in abeyance; but it will not cease to be. Donald, in all his life, had known but two great loves, — his mother and this girl; and the one seemed as much a part of himself as the other.

“Down, Vic!” he said hoarsely, as the dog started forward with the evident intention of barking a welcome to the travellers; and, peering from his hiding-place, with his hand on the dog’s collar, he saw Blanche helped from the stage and supported to the house.

“Mrs. Otis Gilderman,” he said, with curling lip, as she passed in; and with a muttered imprecation on the man who had robbed him, he turned away, his thoughts so full of Blanche that he did not see Ray, who was following her with the baby in her arms.

“There, grandpa! isn’t he a beauty?” said the young aunt, throwing back the baby’s cloak, and holding him up for admiration.

“Do give him to me,” said Mrs. Braddington jealously. “I dare say he hasn’t had any sort of care. Where is your nurse? You don’t mean to tell me that you have come home without one?”

“Oh! I am nurse for the present, mamma,” said Ray, with an attempt at gayety. “Mrs. Hedgway has given me the best of recommendations, and if I can’t fill the situation we shall have to find some one here.”

“What foolishness!” exclaimed Mrs. Braddington; “when you could just as well have brought one with you! What sort of a nurse-girl do you expect to find in Crague?”

Ray made no answer; and Blanche, unable any longer to restrain her emotion, though she had been trying all the way home to nerve herself for just this sort of a reception, threw herself sobbing into her father's arms.

"For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?" cried her mother, instantly taking alarm.

"O mamma, please come see what ails this baby!" called Ray, who had retreated to the next room. "Don't worry her, mamma: she will tell you all about it as soon as she can bear it," she said, closing the door after her mother, who, finding that she could get nothing from Blanche, had reluctantly complied with Ray's summons.

"All about what?" she demanded. "Pray don't keep me in this suspense! What is the matter? What has happened? Is there any trouble between Blanche and her husband?"

"Yes, mamma," faltered Ray: "she has found out that he is a bad man, and she cannot live with him any more."

"Bad!" ejaculated her mother. "Now, what nonsense have you been putting into her head? Of course Mr. Gilderman is no saint—I saw that for myself, and I'd like to see the man that is; but she can't leave him on that account. She must be crazy to think of such a thing!"

"But, mamma—Mr. Gilderman"—And Ray stopped, feeling unable to tell the rest.

"Well, what about him? Why don't you go on?"

"O mamma, he has another wife!" gasped Ray.

"Not living!" cried her mother, clutching her by the shoulder. "Good Heavens!" And the poor woman sank into a chair, and began wringing her hands. "Disgraced! disgraced!" she ejaculated.

"Don't think of the disgrace, mamma. Think of poor Ban," pleaded Ray. "She needs all your love and sympathy."

"I am sure she has no one but herself to thank," said her mother, in a passion of anger and chagrin. "Why didn't she find out about him before she married him? She might have known how it would be, marrying without even asking her own mother's advice. To think of such a blow coming just when we were beginning to hold up our heads again! Oh, it is too much! too much!" And, throwing herself on the bed, she gave way to hysterical sobs. At the same moment the baby lifted up its voice, and for the next half-hour Ray had her hands full in trying to soothe them.

Blanche, meanwhile, in broken sentences, had told her father the whole pitiful story.

"My poor little girl!" he said, drawing his arms closer about her.

"O father, to think of making you all this sorrow and trouble!" she moaned. "I wish we could die, baby and I together."

"Hush! hush!" said her father quickly.

"But I can see no other way out of it," she said in a hopeless voice.

"That is not the right way, my darling," he said,

stroking her hair. "The only right way is to determine with God's help to bear it bravely."

A muffled sob was all the answer he obtained; and wrapping a shawl about her, he laid her on the lounge, and, with a kiss that re-assured her of his pardon, bade her lie there until tea-time.

Old Dido, who had watched as impatiently as her master and mistress for the arrival of the stage, had discovered before the greetings were over that something was amiss; but this made her only the more desirous to emphasize the welcome, and her table that evening would have tempted an epicure. But, however tempting the banquet may be, it is hard to eat with a lump in one's throat. To poor Blanche a supper of herbs would have seemed more palatable, so vividly did it bring back the recollection of her previous return.

"Now jes' take anudder ob dem waffles, Miss Ray," urged Dido, disturbed by the evident lack of appetite in her young ladies. "Yo' isn't eatin' enough to keep de life in a hummin'-bird. An', Miss Ban, yo' better done hab a leetle mo' ob de jell. Yo' doesn't git no sech jell as dat in de city. It 'm wurf all de guaba an' mamalade in queation." But for both of them waffles and jelly seemed suddenly to have lost their flavor.

"I doesn't b'lieve dey'd 'stinguish de odds between de fat ob de land and hoe-cake and bacon, in dere present frame ob min'," Dido mournfully soliloquized, as she cleared the table; but her regret for her wasted waffles was forgotten, when Ray,

feeling that it was best to have no mysteries in the household, told her Blanche's story.

"Yo' poo' deah lamb!" she ejaculated, putting her arms about Ray, and drawing her head to her motherly bosom. "No wonder yo's lookin' clean tuckered out wid sech a triberlation as dat to kerry! 'Clar fo' it, dat man ought to be hung, to go to deceebbin' a young thing like our Miss Ban! But nebber yo' min', honey. De Lord'll bring it all right some ob dese days, yo' jes' done mark my words fo' dat."

It was with a similiar optimistic argument that Mr. Braddington tried to comfort his wife, when she gave vent to her lamentations; and so far from sharing her aversion to the boy, he, like Ray, was disposed to regard him as a genuine godsend, believing that he would help to lift Blanche out of herself.

To Blanche as yet, however, the baby was any thing but a joy, and Ray, perceiving it, was anxious to take the entire care of him; but her father, feeling that this was false kindness so far as Blanche was concerned, made double demands on her time, thus compelling her to leave the child to its mother. A baby to care for has saved many a woman from going mad, by keeping her from brooding over troubles for which there is seemingly no help. In Blanche's case, it served to keep her from growing morbid with thinking of the past, and at the same time held at bay the old restlessness and discontent. By degrees, too, the mother-love came back; for

hard-hearted indeed must be the woman who can nurse and tend a little child, whether her own or another's, without learning to love it; and forlorn must be the baby that fails to make for itself a place in its nurse's heart.

But Ray, though acknowledging the wisdom of her father's interference, always claimed the privilege of a bed-time frolic with the little one; and as the frolic usually took place in the dining-room immediately after tea, they frequently had a spectator. This was Donald, for though lacking the courage to call, he made a practice of strolling past the house in the twilight; and, finding that the evening frolic was an established custom, he soon fell into the habit of stopping in range of the window to watch it; and sometimes it happened, that, while Ray fondled the child, Blanche would sit gazing into space, with a face so sad and hopeless that it filled him with both a mad desire to see vengeance fall on the man who had blighted her happiness, and a yearning to comfort her. One afternoon, at the post-office, the postmaster handed him a letter addressed to "Mrs. Otis Gilderman."

"I suppose that's meant for Mistress Blanche," said the man with a significant shrug. "It's a mighty fine-sounding name, but I reckon she wishes now that she'd carried her fish to some other market."

Before the sentence was fairly finished, Donald had collared him.

"Look here!" he said, towering over the small,

lean figure, like a giant over a pygmy ; " unless you can mention that lady with proper respect, I advise you to keep silent." And letting go his hold, he walked off, leaving the man with a wholesome dread of a repetition of the scene.

" What does it mean ? " said Blanche in a startled voice, when that evening Ray handed her the letter Donald had brought, and which Ray, suspecting from whom it came, would gladly have thrown into the fire without a word to Blanche about it, could she have persuaded herself that she had the right to do it. It was with trembling fingers that Blanche opened the envelope. As she unfolded the letter, a narrow strip of paper slipped out and fell to the floor, but neither of them touched it. Blanche's eyes were devouring the message ; and Ray, with the baby in her arms, sat watching her sister's face.

" Dear Ban ! what is it ? " she cried, as she saw her expression change from contempt to surprise and indecision.

" You can read it if you like," said Blanche, putting the letter into her hand.

The girl read it with blazing eyes. " The wretch ! " she cried, throwing it to the floor ; for the writer, with elaborate rhetoric, had undertaken to prove that his former wife had been so long dead to him that it would be folly for him to consent to receive her again ; and alleging that with her full consent a divorce had been obtained, leaving him free to marry whom he would, he closed with a tragic entreaty for Blanche to return to him.

"How does he dare make such a request?" said Ray white with anger.

"But if he has a lawful divorce, I don't suppose it would be really wrong," said Blanche irresolutely.

"Wrong!" cried Ray, springing to her feet, and tightening her arms about the sleeping child; "what are you thinking of, Blanche? Why, that poor wife's face would haunt you day and night, — such a sad, patient face! — and every mouthful of food would choke you with the remembrance that you were eating her bread, and that she had been driven out to make room for you. The law may call such things right, Ban; but I am sure they are not right in God's sight, and those who do them can never expect a blessing."

In her excitement she had been pacing up and down the room; but now she dropped on her knees beside Blanche, and laid the baby in her lap. And the baby, beginning to coo, caught at his mother's hand, and crowded a finger into his rosy mouth. "But it maddens me every day to see what a burden I am to you here," said Blanche, shrinking from the baby's touch: "my life is wrecked; and it doesn't much matter what I do, nor what becomes of me."

"O Ban, don't say such things!" entreated Ray, putting her arms about her. "Doesn't it matter to father, to me, to all of us? Do banish such thoughts, dear."

"But if I could, if it were right," said Blanche hesitatingly, "it would seem to take away some of the disgrace."

"It would make the disgrace a thousand times greater," cried Ray, starting up again. "I should be ashamed to own you for my sister if you could do a thing like that. Why, even if she were dead, Ban, you could never go back to him, now that you know what wickedness he is capable of; for don't you see, dear, that if he could put away his lawful wife for your sake, he would just as readily put you aside when he tired of you? The only right thing for you to do," she went on, "is to put that letter and check in an envelope, and return them without word or comment."

"I suppose it is," moaned Blanche; "but I am afraid I am not equal to it."

"Then, I will do it for you," said Ray, picking up the papers with as gingerly a touch as if they had been the cast-off garments of a small-pox patient.

Involuntarily Blanche stretched out her hand, but Ray was blind to the movement. "And I shall make short work of it," she said, taking up her pen. Blanche watched her for a moment in silence, and then, with the baby over her shoulder, slipped from the room.

"My poor, poor Ban!" sighed Ray; and thrusting the letter and check into an envelope directed to Mr. Gilderman, she enclosed it in one to Mrs. Hedgway, with a brief note asking her to re-mail it. This done, impatient to have it out of her sight, she gave it to Silas to take at once to the office; and, after an ineffectual attempt to quiet herself, feeling

that there was no room in the house quite large enough to hold her in her present state of mind, she threw a shawl about her, and rushed down to the shore. There her father, who, missing her and fearing something had gone wrong, had started out to look for her, found her some half an hour later, pitching stones into the water.

"What, having a game all by yourself?" he said, picking up a handful of pebbles, and joining in the pastime. "Why, girlie, you throw as if you were pelting an enemy."

"I am," said Ray savagely: "I am stoning that man."

"Perhaps it would do more good to pray for him," said her father gravely.

"Then, I should pray that stones might fall from heaven on his head," answered Ray in a voice that was hard and strained. "You don't know what a bad man he is. O papa, papa!"

Another stone whizzed through the air, and fell with a splash into the water; then she took her father's arm, and told him of the letter Blanche had received.

"'Vengeance is Mine,'" he said softly, when the indignant recital was ended.

"Yes, I know; but vengeance doesn't seem to fall where it belongs," said the girl rebelliously. "Such a man ought not to live. He has spoiled Ban's life."

"No life is irremediably spoiled, my darling, so long as it can be carried to God," he said. And

after they had wandered up and down a little while in the starlight, with the young moon smiling at them out of the west, they went back to the house, quieted and rested.

CHAPTER XIX.

AN UNEXPECTED RETURN.

THAT fall Gene came home, taking every one by surprise; his uncle, with a sick man's waywardness, after making all his plans to go to Egypt, having suddenly decided to return to his native land instead.

"I am sorry to give you such a shock," said the young man, as the family at the parsonage sat down to supper, his mother and Della still uttering their exclamations of astonishment and delight; "but there was no help for it. Uncle Dan, after his mind was made up, wouldn't consent to a day's delay, though I told him just how it would be if we came without sending word in advance."

"On the whole, I think it is better so," said his mother, regarding him with beaming eyes; "for we should have been in a constant state of anxiety about you, there has been so much stormy weather the past fortnight."

"But now we shall have no more foreign letters," said his father, with real regret; for Gene's voluminous letters, full of all that he was seeing and doing in the Old World, had been a tonic to the tired man,

who for ten years had scarcely been absent from his parish as many Sundays.

"Neither will there be any more to be answered," said Della, who abhorred letter-writing. "You can't imagine what a tax it has been on my time and brain to have a letter ready for every steamer."

"You did very well, considering," said Gene; "but you didn't tell me half the things I wanted to know. How is everybody? and what are they all doing? Where is Donald? He doesn't write to me any more, and none of you have mentioned his name in your letters for the last three months."

"We scarcely see him nowadays," said Della, "except at church."

"Donald doesn't seem like himself of late," said Mrs. Pencroft. "I dare say Blanche's trouble touches him more than he would like to own." And the little lady gave a quick and anxious glance at her son, to see how he would take this allusion to Blanche.

"Poor Blanche! that was a pretty rough lesson for her," he replied, with genuine sympathy in his voice, but without any sign of embarrassment, though wondering within himself why Donald should lay it to heart.

"But, hard and sad as it seems, it is doing her good," said his father. "It is astonishing to see how she has softened and ripened."

"I am glad of that," answered Gene. "I had been afraid that she would grow hard and bitter. Trouble of that sort so often seems to make people desperate."

"As a rule it brings to the surface either the best or the worst that is in them," said the minister; "and as to which shall have the ascendancy, it depends chiefly on whether or not they find the Divine hand in their darkness. If they fail to find it, it isn't strange that they grow desperate."

"Do you think Blanche has found it?" asked Eugene, looking up from his plate with keen interest in his eyes.

"She is finding it, I think," said his father. "But even if it resulted in making a saint of her, that man Gilderman's part in it would be none the less execrable—I had almost said damnable. I declare, it is a hard matter to find words strong enough to characterize such wickedness without seeming profane."

"Della, my dear, do see to your father! He is putting salt on his peaches," said Mrs. Pencroft in an undertone.

"Father, have another cup of tea, won't you?" said Della; and while the cup was on its way to be refilled, she quietly removed the dish of fruit which the minister, in his wrath against Mr. Gilderman, had sprinkled bountifully with salt, and put another in its place, with the sugar-dish beside it, at the same time taking the precaution to set the salt-cellar out of his reach.

"I think Rachel has been a great help to Blanche," said Mrs. Pencroft warmly.

"Indeed she has. God bless the child!" said her husband, partaking of his peaches in happy

ignorance of his misdemeanor. "She is so bright and hopeful, it would be a hard matter for Blanche to be with her without imbibing something of her spirit."

Gene's face glowed with pleasure, — it is so good to hear those we love praised, even though we may have no sense of ownership in them, — but instead of responding to these eulogistic remarks, he merely said, —

"I believe I'll take another piece of your cream-cake, Della. I haven't tasted any thing like it for a year." And Della, with a young cook's generosity where the cookery is appreciated, set the cake down before him, and told him to eat of it to his heart's desire.

"I wonder, Dell, if we couldn't run over to Gullnest for a few moments this evening," he said, as they rose from the table.

"But we haven't yet had half a look at you ourselves," interposed his mother. "I shall grow jealous of you if you go running off to see the neighbors the very first night."

"Oh! there is time enough for us to see him, mother," said her husband. "We have had a pleasant surprise, and it is no more than fair that we should let him surprise the rest of his friends. Besides, the fact of the trouble at Gullnest is all the more reason for his calling without any unnecessary delay."

"That is true; but don't stay too long," said the little lady, apprehensive that the demand made on

his sympathies in Blanche's behalf might re-awaken his interest in her.

"No: I am only going to break the ice," he answered with a kiss. "Under such circumstances the first visit is always rather embarrassing, and the sooner it is over the better."

That same afternoon Dido had informed Ray that "somebody hab done go fo' to come. I seed a white handkerchaw a-wabin' from de windaw ob dat stage de hull time 'twas gwine pas' de house. Now, who yo' s'pose it am, Miss Ray?"

"I am sure I don't know, Dido, unless it was Alva Drome," said Ray indifferently.

"Sho, now!" said Dido: "yo' s'pose I doesn't know dat Miss Nancy phiz ob his'n? Tell yo' wat, Miss Ray, I seed a par ob eyes a-blinkin' at dat windah, an' sez I to myself, 'Jes' as shu as yo' lib an' breeve, Missus Dido Gloribella Cæsar, dat am Marsa Gene Pencroft his own blessed self.'"

"What!" said Ray, with a start that sent a small shower of drops from the goblet of water she was carrying to her mother. "Oh, no, Dido! I am sure you have made a mistake. They don't expect him home till next spring."

"Maybe dey doesn't," said Dido; "but you can't make dis chile b'lebe dat dem wasn't Marsa Gene Pencroft's eyes, fo' all dat."

"I am afraid your eyes deceived you, Dido," answered Ray with a sceptical little laugh, adding to herself that it was altogether too good to be true; and when Gene walked in with Della that evening,

she was quite as much taken by surprise as the others had been.

"Why, we thought you were down in Egypt before this," she said, as with her hand in his she looked up into the face that Dido had been so quick to recognize.

"No: we changed our plan, I am sorry to say; for, glad as I am to be at home again, I had set my heart on making the acquaintance of the mummies."

"We are not sorry," said Della. "I couldn't bear the thought of his going to Egypt. I should have expected him to be swallowed by a crocodile, or some other horrible creature."

"A sphinx, for instance," laughed Gene. "I had really wanted to see the Sphinx," he added with sudden gravity: "I thought perhaps she could teach me to read riddles." And then he turned to Ray, and inquired for her mother. Blanche was in the library when they entered, fortunately, as it saved the embarrassment of asking for her; and he greeted her as cordially, apparently, as he had greeted Ray, for he was too thoroughly cured of his boyish fancy to harbor any resentment for the slight she had put upon him, and too generous to feel the least triumph over her humiliation. She was more changed than he had expected to find her; yet he said to himself, as he looked at the pale, sad face, that it was a more lovable face, after all, than that of the proud, self-complacent woman whom he had known as Mrs. Otis Gilderman. But he saw that Ray, too, looked pale and careworn; and a half angry

feeling kindled with the thought that she was sacrificing herself for Blanche.

When one has just returned from a long journey, there is usually abundant seed for conversation; and Eugene, always quick to feel the slightest change in the atmosphere about him, perceiving that silence was the signal for general embarrassment, allowed scarcely a moment's break in the talk. Even Blanche, as she listened, brightened into a semblance of her old self; and, for the first time in many a weary day, was beguiled into genuine laughter.

"It is good to have you back, my boy," said Mr. Braddington as Eugene rose to go, after having been twice reminded by Della that it was growing late. "You must come in often."

"Thank you," he replied: "the temptation will be to come too often, I am afraid. — Now, Dell, it is my turn to remind you that it is time we were at home." For Della, womanlike, had begun conversation at the door, and was in no haste to end it.

As they reached the gate, they saw a tall, dark figure passing in the road.

"It looks like Donald Keith," said Della.

"Ship ahoy! Who goes there?" cried Gene; and the next instant the two friends had their arms about each other.

"Where do you hail from?" asked Donald, when the first embrace was over, gazing at him in the moonlight with unfeigned astonishment.

Eugene began an explanation at once; and Don-

ald, taking his arm, walked on with him to the parsonage.

"Come in, won't you? It is not late," said Gene.

"Not to-night," said Donald: "the tide is falling, and I want to get home before the moon goes down."

"Something has gone wrong with Donald. I am afraid he has seen a sphinx," said Gene in a puzzled tone.

"How could he, when he has never been abroad? There are no sphinxes in this country," said the matter-of-fact Della.

"There are more than you dream of, my dear," said Eugene with the utmost gravity; "but they are not mentioned in the geography."

"That reminds me! You haven't said a word about the school," exclaimed Della, entering at once into a minute account of affairs at the school-house.

"And you don't intend to relieve me, after all?" she cried in dismay, when Gene, having expressed his approval of her system, chanced to speak of her continuance in office as a matter of course.

"I don't see how I can conveniently, Dell, as I propose putting out my shingle, and beginning practice immediately."

"Do you really mean it, my dear boy?" cried his mother, dropping herself on his knee. "I was afraid you would be wanting to start off again as soon as you had fairly seen us.—Do you hear

that, father? He is going to settle right down to business."

"Yes, I hear," said the minister with a smile: "he is making it a day of surprises for us."

"But I don't see why that need interfere with your taking the school," persisted Della: "there is so little sickness in Crague. If you should go from one end of the place to the other to-morrow morning, I doubt if you would find a single case, except Tom Cartry with the rheumatism, and old Mrs. Crosson, who is always complaining of the 'sky-attic' in her hip."

"Very possibly not," said Gene with a laugh; "but when I am not practising, I shall want to be studying. I don't mean to lie idle on the strength of my diploma."

And little Mrs. Pencroft went to sleep that night with a light heart, feeling that she had her boy home "for good."

CHAPTER XX.

A PLEASANT PRESCRIPTION.

THE wisdom of beginning his professional life in Craque had been to Pencroft a matter of long and serious deliberation. In favor of it was the fact that Dr. Ferris at the Neck, the only physician within three miles, was growing infirm, and refused to practise at night. This left an open field to any new practitioner, so far as Craque and the adjacent districts were concerned. But, on the other hand, there was, as Della had said, very little sickness in the place, and that little was seldom of a serious nature. This, however, he felt would be no objection, for the first year at least, as it would give him time to go on with his studies, and to attend lectures in town occasionally. His chief hesitation in regard to remaining in Craque was connected with Ray Braddington. If, as he had supposed, she was engaged to Donald, it would be something of a trial to be constantly witnessing their happiness; but there was a possibility, he said to himself, that this supposition was groundless, and in that case he would rather be in Craque than in any other place on the face of the earth. And, having carefully

weighed all these considerations, he decided that for the present, at least, the wisest thing to do was to remain. His sudden return was not more of a surprise to his family than was the knowledge of this decision to the people of Crague; his sign, "Eugene Pencroft, M.D.," in the window of the little shop on the lot next the parsonage, being their first intimation of it. The building had originally been occupied by a shoemaker; but owing to a preference for fishing on the part of the latter, that led him to regard the duties of his bench as of secondary importance, his customers had gradually transferred their patronage to his more industrious competitor at the other end of the village; and as the shop had stood empty for two years past, Gene found him very ready to dispose of it. Taking possession of it at once, he soon had the place remodelled within and without beyond the recognition of those who had previously known it; and, with his books and his thoughts for company, he settled down for the winter, resolved, that, however little practice he might have, the time should not be wasted.

One morning soon after he was established in his new quarters, his father walked into the office. Gene, who was sitting manlike with his feet on a level with his head, sprang up, and gave his father his chair, that being the only easy-chair the office boasted. "Take a seat, father, take a seat," he said heartily, drawing a stool to the desk, and sitting down beside him.

"I heard you say something about despairing of getting a patient," said the minister, leaning his chin on his cane, and trying to seem in jest; "and as I haven't felt quite as brisk as usual for some time past, I thought I'd drop in and see if you couldn't prescribe some sort of a tonic."

Gene turned his stool about, and gave his father a searching gaze. He wondered that he had not noticed it before, — the worn and tired look in his face.

"The sort of tonic you need," he said, laying his finger on the thin wrist, "is an entire change of occupation and surroundings. Human beings are very much like horses in some respects. They say a horse will travel twenty miles a day, day in and day out, where there is a change of scene, and grow fat on it; but the same horse on a car-track, where he has to go back and forth over the same line week after week, will pine away and die from sheer lack of variety. You have been going over the same track for the last ten years, and it is high time you had a change."

"That would be a very pleasant prescription if there were any possibility of my acting on it," said the minister, leaning back with a smile that was neither hopeful nor merry. "No, you will have to give more practicable advice than that, if you expect your patients to follow it."

"But it is not impracticable in your case," answered Gene. "You have not had a vacation within the memory of the oldest inhabitant, — I mean

any thing worth calling a vacation. You have been preaching here for twenty years; and for the last five years, at least, the only play-spell you have taken has been an occasional trip to the city. And you are a young man, father, comparatively, — not sixty yet, — too young by far to think of breaking down."

"It is all true, my son. I plead guilty to the charge. But what else could I do? The church is too poor to pay a minister to fill the pulpit during my absence, and my salary is too small to admit of my doing it."

"Then let them do without preaching for a month or two," said Eugene. "They may better do that than have you go on killing yourself. It is just the sort of weather for travelling; and a month among your old Berkshire friends would do more to build you up than all the tonics I could give you in a year."

But his father rested his chin on his cane again, and shook his head wearily.

"It is useless to think of any thing like that. It can't be done."

"Yes, it can," cried Gene, growing excited. "Pardon me for contradicting you, father, but I am sure it can be accomplished. I will see the church officers this afternoon; and if they can't do any better, they can have some one read the sermons while you are away."

"But whom could they find to do it?" said the minister. "If you would promise to undertake

that part of it, I could go with a clear conscience. With the exception of Mr. Braddington and Donald Keith, you are the only man in the parish who could do it acceptably."

"I!" exclaimed Gene. "Now, father, I call that taking an unfair advantage of my proposition. Of course I should be willing to do any thing within reason for the sake of having you go; but that is something that belongs to the deacons and elders."

"Not if the deacons and elders have never practised reading aloud," said his father. "Just imagine what work either Elder Wymans or Deacon Munn would make with a sermon! But my going is out of the question. Come, what else can you recommend?"

The young man's gaze was resting on the picture of Faith that hung over his desk, — a picture that he prized not only for its artistic worth, but for a certain sweet and subtle suggestion of resemblance to Ray; and, as if echoing the question that he was revolving within himself, the luminous eyes seemed to say, "Why not? It is not much to do for the Master; not much to do for the tired father who has denied himself all these years, that you might start in life well equipped for the race."

"Father," he said, drawing closer, and laying his hands on his father's knees, — a way he had when very much in earnest, a boyish fashion that he had never outgrown, — "if you will go home, and begin preparations at once, I will promise to read the sermons if no one else can be found to do it."

"Thank you, my boy. I will go home and think about it," said his father with a bright but half-incredulous smile on his fine pale features; and then, with a tenderness rarely shown by man to man even between father and son, he gathered in his own the two hands resting on his knees, and laid his face against them for a moment, just as he had done hundreds of times when they were dimpled baby-hands. And the young doctor was satisfied.

"Remember, a patient, like a private, is not expected to think for himself: he has simply to obey orders," he said, following his father to the door; and the moment office-hours were over for the morning, he hung out his slate, and started in search of the elders and deacons.

"I'll call on Elder Wymans first; and if he fails me, I will see Deacon Munn," he said to himself.

"I don't deny the parson needs a restin' spell," said the elder, who sat mending his net, being a fisherman; "but I don't see how we're goin' to manage it 'thout shuttin' up the church. Can't very well 'ford to run in debt to pay another man while he's cruisin' round."

"But we've got to manage it in some way, Elder Wymans," said Pencroft decisively. "It is absolutely necessary for your minister to have a change, and if you don't care to shut up the church some one can be appointed to read sermons. There are bushels of good sermons to be had for nothing; and if the people understood it, I don't think they would find any fault with the arrangement."

"But who'd do the readin', do you s'pose?" asked the elder.

"Oh! I think you and Deacon Munn ought to be able to manage it between you," said Gene with an insinuating smile.

"Why, man alive!" cried the elder, dropping his net, aghast at the proposition. "Pretty readin' you'd have if I undertook it! and I don't believe the deacon'd get along much better. We can make a prayer when it's necessary, and pass the box, and vote at the church meetin's; but readin' sermons ain't in our line. Much as ever I can do to get through a paragram in the Weekly when Mis' Wymans wants to hear the news. Now, you could do it slick as a whistle. You've kinder got your hand in, and it'd be no more trouble to you'n readin' A B C. Say, now, doctor, why don't you do it?" And the elder, in his vehemence, sprang up and dropped his net as he clapped his hand on Gene's shoulder. "Just you agree to that, and none of us'll have-a word to say against the parson's goin'."

"All right, elder," answered the young man: "if you can't find any one else to undertake it, I'll do the best I can."

"Then, I guess you can consider the thing settled," said the elder. "I'll ask the officers and trustees to stop a minute after prayer-meetin' to-night to pass a vote on it; but I don't think any of 'em 'll be likely to objec', seein' the parson ain't missed more'n a Sunday or two for nigh on to five years."

"Thank you, elder, thank you," said Gene heartily, confident that any measures the elder put to vote would be sure to carry; and as he hastened home to report, the elder settled down to his net again with the complacency of one conscious of having done a good deed.

The minister had made no mention at home of Gene's unprecedented prescription; and consequently when the young man introduced the subject at the dinner-table, — having on reaching home, found the family already seated, — the business of the hour was suspended, and all fell to talking at once.

"You must be ready to start on Monday," said Gene.

"That depends on whether we can get him in order by that time," said Della, mentally wondering how many new collars and handkerchiefs would be needed.

"There isn't much to do except to sponge his Sunday coat," said Mrs. Pencroft, her face beaming with delight.

"But I am not going to stir a step without you, my dear," said the minister, laying down his knife and fork, and straightening himself as if preparing to resist whatever objections the little woman at the other end of the table might see fit to raise. "You are quite as much in need of the change as I am."

"O my dear!" she began in a tone of gentle expostulation.

"Mother? Why, of course. That is always understood," said Gene. "Where you go, she goes."

"But in this case I am afraid it will be too great an expense," said Mrs. Pencroft, her smiling face growing serious.

"But what in the world would he do without you, ma?" cried Della. "He would be sure to go into the pulpit somewhere with his clean collar buttoned outside his soiled one, or his stock turned wrong side before, if he chanced to get in a brown study at any time."

"Of course he would," said Gene. "But just remember, mother, please, that he is not to step foot into a pulpit while he is gone. That is part of the prescription."

"Well, well, it's all an uncertainty still, and we'll let the matter rest now until we know what they decide on at the meeting to-night," said the minister, not yet venturing to congratulate himself.

"There is not much danger that any thing that Elder Wymans takes in hand will fall through," said Eugene. "He will bring the rest over to his way of thinking if he keeps them there till midnight."

Early the next morning the elder stopped at the office door with a beaming face.

"Some of 'em didn't much like to give in at first," he said, twisting a fish-line about his finger as if symbolizing the way in which he had won over the disaffected ones; "but they come 'round when they found you'd agreed to read the sermons, and the parson can pack up and start as soon as ever he likes."

As the result of this unanimous leave of absence,

the minister said a few farewell words to his people the following Sunday, and on Monday he and his wife started on their travels.

"The next thing to attend to," said Gene, "is the selection of a sermon. How I am to go through with my bargain, is an unsolved problem. What do you imagine the people would do, Della, if I should back out?"

"But you can't, Gene!" exclaimed the literal-minded Della. "You are in duty bound."

"I am afraid I am," said Gene, nipping her dimpled chin; "and I suppose there is nothing for me to do now but to see the church fathers, and learn their opinion as to the sort of sermon that would be most likely to give satisfaction." It was Deacon Munn on whom he called to discuss this question.

"Well, now, doctor, I don't know as it makes much difference," said the deacon, laying down his yard-stick, — the deacon kept the village store, — "any thing that's orthodoxy'll dew."

"But I would much rather you would tell me whose sermons you think would be the most acceptable," said Gene. "There is a wide field to choose from, if only I knew what the people would prefer."

"Now, see here, doctor," said the deacon, taking Gene by the button-hole, "I've just thought of something neat. Why don't you hunt up some of your father's old sermons, and read *them*? A sermon that's wuth hearin' once is wuth hearin' again; and I presume to say that the parson's got barrels

of sermons stowed away in the loft that'll be just as new to everybody in Crague as if they'd never heard 'em."

This was a way out of the dilemma that had not occurred to Gene, — a very acceptable way, moreover, — and he went home feeling thoroughly relieved. He knew in just which corner of the garret that consecrated barrel stood, piled to the top and running over; and that afternoon he made his first selection from it.

There was nothing sanctimonious in Eugene Pencroft's nature. His religion was of the simplest and manliest sort, — a religion that made a fine and wholesome atmosphere about him, and effectually prevented the shirking of any thing that he regarded as a duty. But seldom had he looked forward to the performance of any duty with so much dread. Delivering a lecture before the college faculty was as nothing to it, he said to Ray, when telling her of the predicament in which he had placed himself.

"I will tell you what to do," said Ray naïvely. "Just imagine that you are sitting here reading to me. You never seem in the least abashed when you have me for a listener, no matter how much fault I find; and the rest of your audience, I am sure, will be gentle critics in comparison."

"I am not afraid of the criticisms," said Gene. "It is the unusualness and irregularity of the proceeding, I suppose, that makes me dread it. I dare say, by the time I have gone through with it once I shall feel as bold as a lion."

"It is an admirable arrangement," said Ray; "and the very thought of the good you are doing ought to be sufficient to sustain your courage."

"Oh! when I take that view of it I feel like another Casabianca," said Gene gayly. "No matter what horrors assail me, I shall stand at my post and go through with the task."

Still a genuine stage fright came near overwhelming him for a moment as he took his place on the platform that Sunday morning, and met the gaze of the congregation. There in the Keith slip was Donald, with his mother and Ellis Sloane, and just behind them sat Mr. Braddington; from the family pew Della was watching him with affectionate eyes; while below him, behind the asthmatic old melodeon, sat Ray, her warm, bright face uplifted with a look of eager expectancy.

"Coward!" he said to himself, "as if it required a braver heart for me to stand here and read a sermon than is required by Ray to sit Sunday after Sunday at that superannuated instrument, striking keys that give back no sound, and hearing it moan and wheeze at every touch." Then he remembered her suggestion to imagine her his only listener, and at once he grew oblivious to every one else in the house. But he had not read far before she, too, was half forgotten, so thoroughly absorbed did he himself become in the sermon. In selecting it he had merely glanced over it, intending to give it a careful revision before attempting to read it in public; but, having laid it aside at the time, it had not entered

his mind again until Sunday morning, and consequently it was as fresh to him as to his hearers — fresher, in fact, as it had been delivered, he saw by the date, while he was at college some five years previous. Fortunately, his father's firm round hand being as legible as print, he experienced none of the difficulties that usually attend the reading of manuscripts; and Ray as she listened could not help wishing that Mr. Pencroft himself were there to hear him.

"I remember that sermon like a book," said Deacon Munn, stepping up to Gene the moment the doxology ended; "and accordin' to my thinking, it's about as good a one as they make."

"I recollect it too," said Elder Wymans, "that very identical sermon; and I don't see but it's jest as good as the day it was fust preached. A good sermon's something that don't spile with keepin'." Which was all very pleasant for Gene to hear; but while they kept him there, the one with a detaining hand on his coat-sleeve, and the other holding him by the button-hole, he saw Ray, whom, as she closed the melodeon and put away the note-books, he had been watching with the intention of asking her and her father to go to the parsonage to lunch, joined by Mrs. Keith and Donald, and before he could extricate himself the whole party had left the church.

"Of course it is all right," he said grimly to himself, but with an acute sense of disappointment; for next to a clear conscience, he mentally admitted, a word of approval from Ray would have been his best reward.

After that first trial, having mastered his bashfulness, he went on heroically. But suddenly he had been seized with a distrust of his own powers of discrimination so far as his father's sermons were concerned; and having no more confidence in Della's judgment than in his own, he found it necessary every week to ask Ray's help in deciding on the sermon for the following Sunday. This naturally involved a series of calls, and he soon found himself dropping in at Gullnest as frequently and informally as he had been in the habit of doing before he went away. It was strange what a power of attraction that old house had for him. If he started out for a tramp, no matter what direction he took, he usually found himself, sooner or later, at the Braddington gate; if he went to row, before half an hour passed his boat would be pulled up at the orchard pier; while his horse, though he had been scarcely a fortnight in his possession, had already learned that there was one entrance at which he was always expected to stop. But Donald, who for weeks after Blanche's return did not enter the house, had so far conquered himself, that he too, emboldened by Gene's example, was gradually falling into the old ways; and his presence never failed to remind Gene of the covenant he had made with himself to think of Ray only as a friend, at least until he had positive proof that Donald regarded her in the same light. But in either case, he said to his conscience, there could be no possible impropriety in reading sermons to her. As for the girl herself, while ad-

miring their magnanimity, she still secretly pitied them both; but so far as she was personally concerned, busy from morning till night, waiting on her mother, copying music for her father, helping Dido in the kitchen, and frolicking with the baby in the intervals, she did not stop to reason about their visits. It was pleasant to have them coming again just as they had been accustomed to come ever since she could remember until this last sad year: it cheered her father and it cheered Blanche, and Ray was happy.

The minister and his wife were gone six weeks; and to Gene, it must be confessed, their return was not altogether a matter of rejoicing. He was heartily glad to see them, and to observe how fresh and rejuvenated they looked, and he was not sorry to resign his post as reader in church; but he was thoroughly sorry that there were no more sermons to be read with Ray.

"I trust every thing has gone on satisfactorily," said his father, fancying that he looked somewhat serious.

"Entirely so, as far as I am concerned," said Gene. "You can take a vacation whenever you like, as long as that barrel of sermons holds out."

"What!" exclaimed his father. "You don't mean to tell me that you have been reading my own sermons to the people?"

"It was their own choice, and it suited me exactly," answered Gene, laughing heartily at his father's consternation.

“And here I have been rejoicing in the thought that they were having a little change of diet,” said the minister, with just the shadow of a smile flickering about his mouth. “Eugene, I didn’t think you were capable of playing such a trick as that on your old father.”

“Wait till you hear what the people have to say, before you pronounce judgment,” said Gene.

“Oh! I’ll overlook it this time on the score of your inexperience,” said his father; “but you won’t catch me going off on another vacation. It was an imposition on the people.”

Meeting Deacon Munn in the course of the day, he ventured to express his regret at the way in which things had been conducted during his absence.

“Why, nothin’ could have suited us better, parson,” exclaimed the deacon, with a painfully energetic pressure of the ministerial hand. “If the doctor’d gone to readin’ book sermons, it wouldn’t have been half as satisfyin’; for the papers say that some o’ them famous preachers are kind o’ gettin’ off their bearin’s, and most all of ’em have got so many new-fangled notions that you can’t tell half the time what they’re drivin’ at anyway. But your sermons, parson, we know is orthydox; and we can just take ’em all in from beginning to end, without havin’ to stop to see if there’s any thing spurious in ’em.”

The “parson” smiled, and went on his way with a decided reduction in his feeling of dissatisfaction; and presently he came upon Elder Wymans, roping in his seine.

"Howdy do, parson?" he cried, in his bluff sailor voice. "Mighty glad to see you in these parts agin; but your boy did fust-rate, parson."

"I am gratified to hear it," said the minister, pushing back his cuffs, and taking a turn at the capstan; "but I am sorry that you could not have had something new. A change would have done the people good, I think."

"We're all satisfied," said the elder, wiping his forehead with his ample bandanna. "With your sermons, parson, it's all plain sailin', and we don't have no fears of runnin' on to rocks; and you can't say as much as that for everybody's. Some o' them big guns are a good deal like a revolvin' lighthouse: every now and then they turn the dark side, and you can't tell where to find 'em. No, no, parson! we couldn't done any better if we'd had a ship-load of sermons to choose from: you can jest settle down on that. There ain't a man, woman, or child, that's had a word of fault to find; and you can go off on a cruise as often as you like, if you'll only leave your sermon-barrel for the doctor to fish from while your're gone."

"Thank you, thank you," said the parson, resigning the capstan; and bidding the elder good-day, he went home, and relieved his conscience by absolving Gene.

"I'll take it all back," he said heartily. "It was an unheard-of proceeding; but as everybody seems so well satisfied, I won't complain."

CHAPTER XXI.

ADRIFT.

AS a rule, the soul that gives way under adversity shows a corresponding incapacity to endure success; while he who presses on in the face of disappointment and defeat proves himself worthy to be crowned, though the goal be never reached.

Donald, disheartened as he had been for months past, had not been idle; for his trouble, while to some extent it had hardened and imbittered him, had driven him to renewed diligence in his work as his only safeguard against despair. He had long been in the habit of keeping notes of his observations, and of late he had sent an occasional contribution to one of the leading scientific journals. To these articles he himself attached but little importance: they were simply records of his explorations in his chosen field. But they were just the sort of writings that all lovers of nature enjoy, for while not lacking in information they carried with them the aroma of the woods and the breeziness of the sea; and already men were beginning to ask who this new writer was, and now and then came a letter of hearty appreciation from some student of

kindred mind. Usually when a man has an absorbing affection for one woman, to have the approval of the beloved one is sweeter than to "hear the nations praising him afar:" still, there are few men to whom the remoter praise is not an incentive to higher efforts; and Donald, though he would have given more for a kindly smile from Blanche than for the approbation of the greatest savants of the day, found himself materially strengthened by these words of encouragement from the outside world. Somewhere on God's vast organ he had touched a chord that answered back to the voice within himself; and, though he still worked from pure love of science, he felt that every day's discoveries, and every fresh thought that unfolded itself in his mind, helped to bring him into closer sympathy with these friends whose faces were unknown to him. His renewed intimacy with the family at Gullnest was another source of strength to him; for though he never saw Blanche alone, and seldom ventured to address his conversation to her, it was worth more to him than words could tell, just to sit where he could see her face, — dearer to him to-day, pale and sorrowful though it was, than when its radiant bloom had first dazzled his boyish eyes. Had Blanche been still a wife, owing allegiance to one whom the law made her husband, no sophistries would have persuaded the clean-souled, upright fellow that he had any right to seek to keep alive in her mind the slightest interest in himself, or to let her know by word or look that the love he had once

offered to her still lived; but since the man who had entrapped her into that mockery of marriage had not the shadow of a claim upon her, he felt that he had at least the right to be near her, to watch over her, and to hold himself ready for any emergency in which he might serve her. He half envied Gene for his ability to make himself at home with her; for Gene, with the magnanimity of one in whom love has turned to pity, took special pains to prove his friendliness. The baby had taken a wonderful liking to him from the first, and wherever the little fellow might be, at the sound of Gene's voice he was instantly transformed into a "jumping-jack" in his eagerness to get to him; for Gene had a warm place in his heart for children, and even babies are quick to know their lovers. Donald, too, was fond of children, — what manly man is not? — and while his detestation of this child's father was as intense as the love he bore its mother, the fact that it was Blanche's child, and a part of Blanche herself, sufficed, aside from its own innocence and sweetness, to make it precious to him. Yet, with all his longing to caress it, he could not summon courage so much as to lay his finger on its dimpled cheek, and would look on in dumb amazement and with a half-jealous feeling at his heart, to see Eugene snatch the little creature from its mother's arms, and go marching around the room with it mounted on his shoulder. It was Ray who broke through this barrier of bashfulness. The young naturalist one evening, after a day's

tramp in the woods, called to proffer a basket of wintergreens, and was directed by Dido to the dining-room. Entering informally, he found Ray sitting there in the twilight dandling the baby.

"Take a seat, Donald, and make yourself at home until this small gentleman is disposed of for the night," said the young nurse, pushing toward him the chair that had been doing duty as a footstool.

"No, thank you," he said, "I can't stay. I have been out since early morning, and have some work to do at home this evening; but I found a little patch in the heart of the woods to-day, red with berries, and I thought you might like a few."

"Then, just please hold the baby a moment while I empty your basket," said Ray, as she thanked him; and before Donald could say yea or nay, she had put the baby into his arms and vanished. His first sensation was one of utter dismay, expecting every instant to hear the child shriek with fright; but when instead, with a soft, cooing laugh, it put up its morsel of a hand, and began pulling at his beard, he drew a long breath, and laid his face against the velvet cheek.

If the truth must be told, Ray purposely consumed twice the length of time that was necessary in emptying the berries; and when at last she returned to the dining-room, she found Blanche there seated before the fire, warming the baby's little gown, while Donald was pacing up and down the room with the baby on his shoulder. The moment,

however, that Ray entered with the basket, he returned the child to her keeping, and hastily took leave. But from that moment he never lost an opportunity to cultivate the little fellow's acquaintance.

Gene noticed all these signs; but remembering the tableau in the woods that autumn day, he was still unable to read the riddle.

Mrs. Braddington, from the day of Blanche's return, had apparently lost all interest in what was going on about her. Blanche herself she treated with sullen indifference; while as for the poor baby, he would have been quite as well off without a grandmother, so far as grandmotherly pettings and indulgences went, for she absolutely refused to have him in her sight. Blanche, in her humility, owned that she had no right to expect any other treatment; but it seemed hard that her father and Ray must bear the penalty with her. Fortunately for the rest, but unfortunately for herself, Mrs. Braddington insisted on remaining in solitude the greater part of the time, shutting herself in her room, and objecting to see any one. The family at first were not inclined to interfere with this seclusion; but they soon perceived that it was telling on her health, and that unless a change could be made she would eventually become a confirmed invalid. Their remonstrances, however, had no effect; Mrs. Braddington declaring that she was an invalid already, and that there was nothing left in life sufficiently desirable to make her wish to prolong her existence.

Pecuniarily the affairs of the family were beginning to brighten; for Mr. Braddington's music, though Mr. Gilderman was no longer his publisher, was steadily growing in popularity, and the income from it was sufficient to give the young house-keeper a sense of plenty that was both novel and delightful.

"If it continues, mamma, I think we shall soon be able to afford a few luxuries, — a new carpet for the dining-room, for instance," she said brightly, hoping to rouse her mother's interest; but her mother answered with her usual querulousness, that it made no difference now whether they ever had any thing new. Being accustomed to this sort of *douche*, Ray was seldom disheartened by it; and she mentally resolved that the house should be re-furnished as fast as her funds would permit.

"What a comfort money is!" she said to herself as she counted her savings. Yet, practical as she was, the money itself was of far less real value to her than the music that brought it, the music that had sung itself in her father's brain; and the completion of a new score was always an event to her.

"O papa, if we could only hear it rendered by a full orchestra!" she said, looking up at him with shining eyes, one day after playing for him the several parts of a composition to which he had that morning added the finishing note.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, deary, you and I," he whispered, as if afraid to utter aloud any thing so delicious: "as soon as we are a little richer,

we'll run away to the city for a few days, if poor mamma can spare us, and just feast our souls on music."

"If we only could!" she said, laying her face against his arm.

"We can when the right time comes," he answered, smoothing her hair with his crippled fingers.

The months drifted by, however, with the monotony that usually follows a crisis of any sort, and the winter was past before "the right time" came.

"I am afraid we shall have to wait until next year," he said, more sorry on her account than on his own; but Ray, having from the first relegated it to the far future, did not regard it as a disappointment. It was simply a delay of the promised joy, and she had it still to dream of.

The spring with its fresh accession of care brought also, as it brings to every healthy heart, a fresh accession of gladness. She was glad in spite of herself, in spite of "poor Ban" and "poor mamma," and was ready at all hours to "break forth into singing." Her mother, who in her morbid and irritable state of mind would have silenced the very birds had it been possible, so far from rejoicing in the girl's cheerfulness, daily expressed her wonder that any one could feel so light-hearted when there was nothing in life but vexation and trial. Blanche too, joyless and hopeless herself, wondered that she had the heart to sing, yet was thankful that the trouble which she herself had brought upon the family had not banished all happiness. But under

Ray's cheerfulness the old pain was still throbbing; and sometimes, when her mother's fretful voice broke in upon her, the singing came near changing to sobs.

"Poor mamma! what is to become of her, Ban?" she said one day when Mrs. Braddington had been more irritable and complaining, if possible, than usual. "No wonder she is nervous and morbid, shut up as she is from morning till night. If ever that ship comes in, she shall have a pony and carriage, and go riding every day. It would do her a world of good."

"I am afraid that ship has gone down at sea," said Blanche sadly.

"Not a bit of it," answered Ray. "I expect to see it come sailing into port some day with flying colors."

If she had but known, the long-dreamed-of ship was even then on its way, but the flag was at half-mast.

One afternoon when the apple-trees were just beginning to shed their snowflakes, she enticed Blanche to take the baby into the orchard; and while they sat in the grass, laughing to see the child spread his little palms to catch the white petals, Donald stopped at the gate with a letter in his hand. Ray sprang up instantly, and went to meet him.

"Is it for Blanche?" she asked apprehensively, for of late several letters had come for Blanche in Otis Gilderman's handwriting; and though they had

been returned unopened, Ray was constantly in dread of more.

"It is for Mr. Braddington, and is sealed with black," said Donald, handing it to her.

"I don't understand it," she said in a startled voice; but a glance at the address showed her that it was from aunt Rachel. "It must be uncle Braddington," she said; and leaving Donald at the gate, she went slowly up the walk, staring at the black seal in the sunshine, and wishing that her father could have been spared this new sorrow.

Blanche meanwhile had risen, and was standing with the child in her arms, the white flakes falling over them both. Donald, with his hand on the gate-post, stood still a moment as if to take in the picture, and then, without speaking, lifted his hat and walked away.

"Ah, baby! he is having his revenge," she said, turning with slow steps toward the house. Ray met her at the door.

"Uncle Braddington is dead, Blanche, and aunt Rachel wants father to come to her at once."

"Then you will go too?" said Blanche.

"Yes, unless we can persuade mother to go. The trip would do her good." But Mrs. Braddington resented the proposition.

"How can you imagine that I would be willing to show my face there, disgraced and humiliated as I have been?" she said to Ray. "Your father can do as he pleases: men have no sensitiveness; and of course, if he goes, you will think you must go

with him ; but for my part, I want to hide my head for the rest of my days."

Blanche, who had been standing in the doorway, turned with a white face, and fled up-stairs ; all the peace that of late little by little had been drifting with the sweetness and silence of the falling blossoms into her heart, blown to the winds by one sharp word.

"O mother, please, for Blanche's sake, don't say such things!" entreated Ray. "It is hard enough for her to bear, at best."

"Hard! is it harder for her than it is for me, I'd like to know?" said her mother in a high, shrill voice. "Hasn't it broken my heart, and made me old before my time?"

"But, mamma, you have not the consciousness of having brought it on yourself," said Ray gently. "That, I think, must be the hardest of all."

"Nothing can be harder than to feel that your own child has disgraced you," said her mother, clinching her hands. "It crazes me to think of it! And you and your father go on as if nothing had happened."

"But, mamma, we have at least the right to love her," answered the girl; and then, feeling that it was worse than useless to continue the subject, she began talking of aunt Rachel.

"Yes, and now you will go to wasting your sympathy on her," said Mrs. Braddington; "and there is no call for it whatever. Your aunt Rachel has never known any thing about trouble. She has had

every thing heart could wish, and nobody but herself and her husband to worry about." And Ray, despairing of making an acceptable response, abruptly left the room, and began her preparations for the journey.

"I don't like to go, Ban, even for a day, particularly just now when mother is feeling so depressed," she said regretfully; "but it hardly seems right to let father go alone, with his poor hands."

"There is no help for it, I suppose," sighed Blanche; "only don't stay any longer than is necessary, I beg of you, or I shall go wild. I know I deserve every word of it; but, O Ray! that doesn't make it hurt any the less."

Ray dropped the skirt she was folding, and threw her arms about her sister.

"Yes, Ban, it is hard, I know," she said, trying in vain to stifle a sob; "but she is our own mother, we must remember that, and some time, I am sure, her mother-love will rise above this bitterness."

For a moment they sobbed together, with their arms about each other; and then Ray went quietly back to her packing.

In the evening a heavy rain came on.

"I am almost wicked enough to wish that it would storm so hard as to keep you from going," said Blanche. But the next morning the sun rose cloudless, on a world full of bloom and fragrance; and at eight o'clock the two travellers took their seats in the stage. A holiday had come at last, but they made the journey with sad hearts; Mr.

Braddington grieving sincerely for his uncle, and full of regret that he had not been able to see him once more in life; while Ray, oppressed anew with the thought of the unhappiness at home, forgot even the gladness of the spring-time. But before they had gone half the distance to Cliff Haven, the wondrous sweetness of the morning began insensibly to beguile them of their sadness; for the road lay past blossoming orchards, and through moist woods where the moss glistened still with raindrops, and where the young shoots of the oaks and maples glowed like spikes of crimson flowers against the delicate green background, while overhead the dog-wood flaunted its white banners; and through woods and orchards and across the marsh meadows came the wind from the sea, balmy and life-giving; and back and forth in the luminous air flashed gay-winged orioles and black-crested woodpeckers, and bluejays and robins and mocking-birds, all twittering and carolling as if wild with joy.

"They kind o' seem to be enjoyin' life," said the sociable "Joshway," who, finding the roads somewhat heavy, was walking his horses. "It's curus now, if you ever noticed it, that you never see a bird actin' as if it felt down in the mouth; not unless it might be a nowl, and they don't know enough to do any thing but stare, and some way a nowl don't seem like a bird, anyhow."

"I should think you would feel acquainted with all the birds on the road, Mr. Brant, going over it so often," said Ray.

"Well, I reckon I dew, purty nigh," answered "Joshway." "I allers had a likin' for birds, they seem so innercent like; but most of 'em's a good deal like summer boarders, — they're movin' round so much that you don't have no great chance to get intimate with 'em."

"A parrot never seems to me a very cheerful bird," said Ray, not at all averse to keeping up the conversation.

"Well, no, not perticlarly," said "Joshway;" "but then parrots ain't one thing nor another. They look like birds, and they talk like folks, and they ain't neither one. Parrots is idyots, idyots in feathers; and I wouldn't have one of 'em round the house talkin' his rydiculous nonsense, much soon'n I would a live lunertic."

Mr. Braddington smiled, while Ray laughingly declared herself in full sympathy with these views concerning parrots; and had the roads continued to furnish an excuse for slow driving, "Joshway" would doubtless have continued his ornithological discourse; but the soil had become firmer, and finding that he had lost time, he started his horses off at a pace that set every board in the old stage to rattling, and made conversation an impossibility.

At Cliff Haven the travellers took the afternoon train, — an extravagance in which they would scarcely have felt justified, but for the urgency of the case, — and at eight o'clock that night they were standing with aunt Rachel beside her dead. The gentle old lady seemed to be bearing her sorrow with for-

titude; but after giving them the particulars of her husband's last days, she complained of weariness, and went to her room. The travellers, too, were weary, and retired at an early hour; but before the night was half gone, Mrs. Trabbs the housekeeper knocked frantically at their doors with the information that her mistress was ill. Hastily dressing, they descended to aunt Rachel's room, hoping to find that Mrs. Trabbs had been needlessly alarmed. But though the sufferer was still conscious, there was barely time for a farewell word to each before death sealed her lips. Hence the brief letter that Ray had written home that evening was speedily followed with one carrying the account of aunt Rachel's sudden death, together with the information that as the settling-up of the estate devolved upon Mr. Braddington, they were likely to be indefinitely detained.

"Every thing is yours, Jerome,—yours and little Rachel's," had been almost the last words uttered by the dying woman; and Ray, hoping that the announcement would help to reconcile her mother to their lengthened absence, added in postscript, "Perhaps you will be glad to know that every thing is left to us. At last, at last, the ship is in; but to have it come in this sad manner takes away half the pleasure of possession."

Blanche, whose one aim during those lonely days had been to keep out of the reach of her mother's voice, was sewing in her own room, with the baby playing at her feet, when Mrs. Braddington walked

in flushed and excited, and shook the letter in her face.

"Read that!" she cried; "read that, and see what you have lost by your folly! Much good it will do us now, that elegant house with the pictures and silver! And to think that we might have gone back, and held up our heads with the best of them, if it had not been for you!"

"But the rest of you can go and enjoy it, mother; and we will stay here, baby and I," said Blanche humbly.

"What, now! Go back, and have those who were once proud to have me recognize them, whispering together over my disgrace?" cried her mother. "You are mad to think of it. If it had only come two years ago! or if you had only waited, idiot that you were! You might have known that that Otis Gilderman was not a man to be trusted. I saw it before I had been a day in his house, the hypocrite!"

"It is too late now, mother, to waste regrets over that," said Blanche with forced calmness.

"Yes, it is too late now to do any thing but sit here and brood over our trouble," said her mother. "Even your poor sister must have all her prospects blighted for life, just for your folly. Oh, it is shameful! shameful! It is enough to make me wish you had never been born."

Blanche had listened to this tirade with her face growing whiter and sterner with every word; and the moment her mother left her, she sprang to the door, and turned the key.

"She shall never have an opportunity to say that to me again," she said fiercely; "but, O baby, baby! what shall I do with you?"

The first thing to do evidently was to quiet him; for the little fellow, frightened by his grandmother's voice, was wailing piteously.

"If Ray were here, she would not let me go," she said, taking the child to her breast; "but she will not be home for days, and it will kill me to stay any longer, baby."

The child looked at her sorrowfully, with great round tears in his eyes, as if mutely entreating her not to forsake him; but her face did not relax its determined look, and as soon as his sobs ceased, she put him down, and began hastily filling a large valise. When Dido called her to supper, she thrust the valise out of sight, and taking the baby in her arms, went down to the table, and forced herself to eat.

Her mother, as usual, remained in her own room; and Blanche, feeling that it was impossible to endure the torture of seeing her again, commissioned Dido to carry in her tea and toast.

As soon as the meal was over, she wrapped a shawl about the baby, and, under pretence of needing exercise, walked down to the little dock, and made sure that the rowboat was in trim for a voyage; then in the dusk, having previously ascertained from Dido that Silas had gone to the village, she carried out the oars, one at a time, and laid them in the shadow of the orchard fence, while

the rowlocks, muffled in her handkerchief, were hidden in her pocket.

“ ‘Tain’t a werry good plan, habbin’ dat chile out w’en de dewes am fallin’, Miss Ban,” said Dido, meeting her in the hall on her way to her room.

“ I know it, Dido ; but it is a lovely evening, and I had him well wrapped up. I believe the walk has made me hungry, Dido ; ” and going to the pantry, ostensibly “ just for a bite of something,” she smuggled two or three biscuits under her shawl.

Late that night, or rather in the early morning of the following day, hours before the people of Crague were astir, a slender figure, wearing a waterproof cloak, and laden with a heavy valise, stole from the house and through the orchard ; and presently in the starlight a little boat with a single occupant shot out from the dock, and headed toward the east.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EMPTY BOAT.

“**R**ECKON Miss Ban done gone fo’ to sleep her eyes out,” muttered Dido, the next morning, breakfast having been ready and waiting a full half-hour; and at last, thoroughly out of patience, she shuffled up stairs, and knocked at the door which was slightly ajar.

“Better make hase down, Miss Ban, or ye won’t hab nuffin’ fit to eat. De steak am jes’ about spiled now.” Getting no answer, she made bold to enter.

“De Lord hab massy on us!” she exclaimed, catching sight of the empty bed, which, though creased and partially disarranged, as if some one had lain down on the outside, had evidently not been slept in. But the room was not quite deserted; for in the little crib lay the baby still asleep, Blanche having purposely kept him awake the previous night an hour beyond his usual bedtime, that he might sleep the later in the morning.

“Yo’ poo’ deah lamb!” she said, as the child, roused by her footsteps, opened his eyes, and began to croon. Stooping to take him up, she found a note pinned to the pillow.

“ ‘Clar fo’ it, ef Miss Ban ain’t done gone an’ lef’ him! Reckon now de missus’ll come to her senses; fo’ it am jes’ her own doin’s, de good Lord knows, nebber gibbin’ de poo’ gal nuffin’ but de freezinest sort ob looks, wid now an’ den a word wid a double edge to it. ’Tain’t accordin’ to gospel to treat poo’ sinners dat ar way, specially wen de’re yer own flesh and blood; an’ wat’s to become ob us widout Miss Ray heah to sarcumnabigate tings, am mo’ ’an I kin tell.” Moaning to herself, she took up the baby, and went to report matters to her mistress. That it was a just dispensation of Providence, Dido was fully persuaded in her own mind, and she piously hoped that Mrs. Braddington would receive it in the proper spirit; but she was not prepared for the look that overspread the poor lady’s face when she read Blanche’s message.

“Do not let them search for me,” ran the note. “I am not going to do any thing desperate; but I think my mother will be happier without me, and for her sake I am going away. If it were possible, I would take the baby with me; but a woman with a baby in her arms has no chance in the world, and I have my bread to earn. As soon, however, as I can find a home for him, I will relieve you of him.”

There was a cry and a groan as the paper fluttered from the nerveless hands, and Mrs. Braddington dropped to the floor like one smitten with death.

“De good Lord help us!” ejaculated Dido, putting down the baby, and lifting her mistress to the

bed; and after deluging the white face with water and camphor without succeeding in restoring consciousness, she rushed out to find Silas.

“Jes’ drop dat hoe, Silas Crane, an’ go fas’ as dem long legs kin trot, an’ bring Doctor Gene fo’ de missus, an’ tell him not to let de grass grow under his foot ef he don’t want her to gib up de gose afore he arrobe.”

Silas obediently stopped his work, and started for the village; and while Dido, who had pacified the baby with a bottle of milk, was still trying to revive her mistress, the young doctor walked in, looking much perplexed.

“Tank de Lord, yo’s come!” said Dido, sinking into a chair. “Dis am a nafflicted house, Marsa Gene. Marsa Braddin’ton an’ Miss Ray am gone to de city to de funeral obloquies ob dere uncle; an’ las’ night Miss Ban done gone an’ toted herself off widout sayin’ nuffin’ to nobody, ’cept de few words on dat dar bit ob papah, an’ wen de missus seed it she jes’ drops down like as if a stone hab hit her in de head.”

Pencroft, who had been chafing Mrs. Braddington’s hands, took up the note, and hastily ran his eye over it, feeling that under the circumstances he was justified in reading it.

“The first thing to do is to send for Mr. Braddington and Miss Ray,” he said; and after giving Dido directions as to the treatment to be pursued, and despatching Silas with a note asking his mother to come to Dido’s help, he mounted Boreas, and

started for Cliff Haven, that being the nearest telegraph-station.

The message he sent was as concise as possible: "Mrs. Braddington has had a partial paralysis. Come at once."

By three o'clock he was again at Mrs. Braddington's bedside.

"She has neither moved nor spoken," said his mother, in answer to his inquiries.

"It is hard to tell how it will end," he said anxiously. Late in the afternoon Mrs. Braddington opened her eyes, and tried to speak, but the distorted lips could not articulate a word distinctly. Mrs. Pencroft brought a slate and pencil; but she turned away with a gesture of impatience, and sank again into unconsciousness.

Just at nightfall Captain Decker knocked at the kitchen door, and informed Dido that he had found Miss Ray's boat drifting in the bay some ten miles below, and had towed it home.

"'Tain't a very safe thing to do," he said as he deposited the oars and rowlocks, "letting a boat go off on a cruise without anybody to manage her; and if I hadn't happened to come along just as I did, most likely some of them 'longshore men would have gobbled her up before this."

"De trufe am, I spec', the bad news from de city so obflustercated Miss Ray dat she gone an' fo'got all about dat der boat," said Dido coolly.

"Well, you just tell her to take better care of it next time," said the captain.

At noon the following day Mr. Braddington and Ray arrived, having taken a carriage at Cliff Haven instead of waiting for the stage.

"What seemed to be the cause?" asked Mr. Braddington, holding the passive hands.

With considerate brevity Gene told the story, at the same time giving them Blanche's letter. A cry escaped Ray's lips, but catching sight of her father's white face she rallied at once.

"Blanche is safe, papa, I am sure of that; and when she knows how sick poor mother is, she will come back," she said, putting her arm through his.

"Oh, yes!" said Gene cheerfully, "the indications are that she has not gone far away." And then he told them of Captain Decker's bringing home the boat. "The probability is that she has gone to some place down the bay, with the intention of finding something to do; and I think we may be able to discover her without making the matter public."

"Making it public would do no good, I am afraid," said Mr. Braddington sadly. "If she has made up her mind to stay away, nothing that we can do will be likely to bring her back."

Ray hastily gathered up her wraps, and left the room.

"Ban! Ban! how could you do it?" she moaned as she went wearily up the stairs. As she entered the room, something white on the little book-stand caught her eye.

"Perhaps this will tell more," she said eagerly,

seeing that it was a note in Blanche's handwriting addressed to herself. And this is what she read : —

"Forgive me, Ray dear, for going; but I could not bear it another day, the bitter words and the cold sharp looks. I know I deserve it, but it drives me wild for all that; and I think mother will be happier to have me out of her sight. Ask father to forgive me; and please, dear, do not let them search for me. I shall try to find a place either as a governess or music-teacher, and to be advertised as a runaway would spoil my chance of success. I am sorry to be obliged to leave baby on your hands; but I see no other way for the present, and I know that with you he will have the tenderest of care. Just as soon as I am settled somewhere, I will write to you; and until then you must believe that I am still

"Your loving

"BLANCHE."

Here was at least the comfort of a promise, and Ray hastened to give the letter to her father.

"There is nothing for us to do but to be patient," he said when he had read it; and in consequence of their decision to do nothing to make it public, none of the neighbors, with the exception of the Keiths and Pencrofts, knew the truth concerning Blanche's absence.

"If anybody hab de *imperdence*, Silas Crane," said Dido with wise precaution, "to go to axin' yo' about Miss Ban, yo' kin jes' tell 'em dat she'm done gone to seed her friends. Dat am de trufe anyhow, kase it's sartin sure she ain't gwine to see her enemies; an' 'tain't none ob dere bis'ness nohow, an' I hopes yo' won't feel no call, Mr. Crane, to go divulgin' family sekwitz."

This admonition of itself might not have been sufficient to restrain Mr. Crane's innate fondness for imparting information; but the sight of Ray's pale face caused a sudden moisture in his old eyes, and made him mentally resolve that no word of his should add a straw's weight to the trouble.

For Donald Keith it was a harder matter to be reconciled to silence and inaction. Could he have had his way, he would have set out at once to search for her, nor would he have rested until he had found her and brought her home; but Ray at last convinced him that this would be but another mode of advertising her, and that the wiser way would be to wait patiently till the promised letter came. Yet she herself would have found it impossible to be patient, had not her fears for Blanche been swallowed up in her anxiety for her mother. The poor invalid still lay in a semi-unconscious condition, occasionally opening her eyes and staring blankly at those about her, but unable to articulate a word, and equally unable to communicate by writing. The young doctor, who had made a specialty of similar cases in his hospital practice, after resorting to every known expedient in the hope of restoring her, had consulted by letter several of the most eminent physicians in the city; but nothing new had been suggested, and he was forced to the conclusion that this, too, was a matter of time. Eventually the strange detent that had suspended speech and action might be lifted; and until then they could do nothing but possess their souls in

patience. Meanwhile Ray had no lack of willing helpers. One of the wisest and most efficient of these was Sally Decker. Early in Mrs. Braddington's sickness she had come to Ray, begging that she would let her share her vigils; and Ray, accepting her services at first only to avoid wounding her by a refusal, soon found that Sally had the rare gift of knowing just how to adapt herself to the sick-room.

"You ought to adopt the profession of nurse, Sally," she said, in admiration of her deft ways.

"It is work that I should like, but who would give me a recommendation?" said Sally humbly.

"I would," said Ray, putting her arm about her.

"Yes, but who would want me?" asked the girl, her sensitive mouth beginning to quiver. "O Ray! I feel it more and more, that there is no place in the world for me."

"I am sure it isn't right for you to feel so, dear," said Ray. "There is always a place for those who love the Lord, if only they are willing to take the place to which he points them. If you love him, why should you be afraid to try to serve him? Think how much good you could do in sick-rooms. Why, it almost makes me envy you!" And Sally went home pondering the suggestion, and wondering if it was possible that there was any work for her to do in the world.

Another of Ray's helpers was the widow Coleman, who had been engaged as housekeeper and assistant nurse, an arrangement that took a load of

care from the girl's shoulders, and at the same time supplied the baby with a playmate.

"A child that has no companions near its own age always seems to me defrauded of one of its inalienable rights," said Ray one day, when Blanche's baby and the widow's three-year-old boy were frolicking together.

"Yes," responded Mrs. Coleman, "children are sociable creeturs; and it ain't at all surprisin' that they should feel more at home like with them that's somewhere near their own size than they do with us growed-up folks. It always 'pears to me as if we must seem kind o' like giants to the little things."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LONELY VOYAGE.

FORTUNATELY for Blanche, when she started on her lonely voyage, both the tide and what little wind there was were in her favor. But it was an uncertain and perilous undertaking at best, and except for her resolute will her heart would have failed her. Physically she was more courageous than Ray. Ray did a thing, however hard, because it was the right thing to do. Blanche did it because she wanted to do it, and just now there was nothing she so much wanted to do as to escape from her mother. As to whether it was right or wise to do it, she had not stopped to reason; yet when she found herself alone on the water in the midst of the solemn stillness, a sense of mingled awe and misgiving came over her. What was to become of her? Whither was she drifting? She almost wished that she could drift on until the sea swallowed her up. But she had long ago promised Ray that she would do nothing to harm herself. And, besides, she hardly felt ready to rush unbidden into the presence of Him who held this great still world in his hand. Then across her mind floated a stanza that she

had heard Ray singing with joyous repetition only the day before aunt Rachel's letter came : —

“I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air:
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.”

Ray could sing that with a confident heart. But what claim had she to “his love and care”? she who never in her life had asked his guidance, and who had made her own foolish will a law unto herself. But who could censure her for what she was doing now? Was she not giving up every thing, that her mother might have peace? Yet, reason as she would, in her inmost consciousness she was obliged to acknowledge the simple truth, — that she was trying to run away from that which she had brought on herself, and which she had not the moral courage any longer to endure. But she had started, and she would not turn back, not at least until she had made an effort to find work. In the good fortune that had come to the family she could have no part, and her presence would be a constant drawback to the happiness of the others. Then her mother's reproachful words reiterated themselves. Ah! indeed, if she had only waited instead of making such haste — what vain haste it had proved! — to possess the things she coveted, every thing she had most desired might now be hers, and she a free, glad girl to enjoy it all.

How still the night was! There was no moon,

but the stars gleamed with wintry brightness, and here and there against the horizon a lighthouse lamp flamed out of the darkness like an ogre's eye. The only sound was the steady plash of the oars. The awful stillness deepened about her, and there was a chill in the air that crept into her very heart; but it was the chill of the departing night, the stillness that heralds the dawn. Presently a soft, warm light stole up the sky; in the east, shoals of pink clouds, fairer than gardens of roses, floated like drifting coral isles, and a great bank in the west reflected the glory from every rift and peak. From time to time there was a whirr of wings in the air; and now and then a fish leaped up, shaking from its fins a shower of diamonds. The world was coming to life again, and she was no longer alone. For two hours she had been rowing; and now, putting down the oars, she let the boat drift with the tide, while she refreshed herself with a biscuit. She had come in sight of Mannaquogue, a little village ten miles from Crague, and suddenly a glint of light from the church-steeple warned her that day was advancing, and that she had no time to waste; and taking the oars again, she rowed without stopping until home was five miles farther away. The sun, by that time an hour high, was beginning to take the edge from the morning air; and the tired rower loosened her cloak, and pushed back her hat. On shore smoke-wreaths were curling from the farmhouse chimneys, and here and there a boy sauntered past, driving his cows to pasture.

Presently another steeple caught the sunlight. She had never been below Mannaquogue ; but she knew this must be Quonbasset, the last village of any importance on that side of the bay. This from the first had been her intended stopping-place ; for she remembered, after her resolution to leave home was already taken, to have seen in the last Cliff Haven "Sentinel" an advertisement from a resident of Quonbasset for the services of a family music-teacher. She might be too late, or the position was perhaps an undesirable one ; but in either case it could do no harm to make the application : and warned by the increasing signs of life that the inhabitants were beginning to bestir themselves, she drew up under the shelter of a clump of low growing bushes ; and, giving a hasty glance about her to see that her landing was not likely to be observed, she sprang ashore with her valise in her hand, and turned toward the village, leaving the boat adrift. Half way up the main street she came upon a plain two-story house, bearing the imposing sign, "The National Hotel." Her arm was aching with the weight of her valise ; and not knowing how much farther she might have to walk before reaching the place she had in view, she decided to stop and refresh herself. The door stood invitingly open ; and meeting a servant-girl in the hall, she inquired how soon breakfast would be served.

"In about ten minutes, miss," said the girl, as she led the way up-stairs ; and by the time Blanche had made herself presentable she heard the gong.

Replacing her hat, and masking the upper part of her face with a heavy veil, she descended to the dining-room. But the disguise was needless, for she found herself the only guest at the table; and hastily disposing of her breakfast, she set out in search of Mrs. Chauncey Rodman.

"She lives in the big yeller house the other side of the church," said the clerk; and five minutes later she found herself standing in front of the yellow house with her hand on the great brass knocker. She had brought with her a letter of commendation which Mrs. Hedgway had given her at the time she was forming a class in the city, and with this for an introduction she had no difficulty in obtaining a hearing. Fortunately Mrs. Rodman was not inclined to be inquisitive. She saw before her a plainly dressed young woman, with a prepossessing face, and quiet, ladylike manners; and having satisfied herself that she was competent to teach, she engaged her at once, on the strength of Mrs. Hedgway's recommendation, as music-teacher and governess, without asking further questions. The daughters who were to be her pupils were bright, pleasant girls, and, as she was required to have them under her care but six hours a day, it promised to be an easy position; but when one carries a burdened heart, a large amount of leisure is not calculated to lighten the load. Mrs. Rodman, who was a widow, was a grave, silent woman, absorbed in her children and her household affairs; and having engaged Blanche to teach, she evidently

expected nothing of her but the conscientious performance of this one duty. Consequently the young governess found more time on her hands than was desirable. The days dragged in spite of the six hours' occupation; and the long evenings, when she had nothing to do but sit and think, grew to be almost intolerable: yet even this, she tried to persuade herself, was better than being under the same roof with her mother. A month passed before she gained courage to write to Ray; and then it was only a few lines, telling her that she was well, and had found congenial employment. But, instead of mailing the letter at Quonbasset, she took the stage the next morning for Mannaquogue, under pretence of wishing to do a little shopping, and mailed it there.

"Please do not write to me," had been her closing request; but Ray despatched an answer by the next mail, telling her of their mother's illness, and begging her to come home without delay. The letter was sent under cover of one addressed to the Mannaquogue postmaster, asking to have it returned if not called for within ten days; but Ray, though she thought it wise to take this precaution, would not allow herself to feel any doubt as to its reaching its destination.

"She will certainly want to hear from us; and wherever she is, she will come at once when she knows how anxious we are about poor mamma," she reasoned; and day after day, watching at her mother's bedside, she would start at every unusual sound, thinking that Blanche had come. It went on thus for a fortnight, and then the return of the letter put an end to expectation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLEW.

MEANWHILE there had been no apparent change in Mrs. Braddington. It was a pitiful sight to see her lying there week after week, speechless and motionless, like one whom some evil spell was gradually turning to stone; and the long strain told heavily on the two who so tenderly nursed and watched her. Mr. Braddington grew bent and gray, and the color faded from Ray's young face; but while casual observers noticed only that they were becoming worn and pale, those who looked closer saw in the place of manly vigor and girlish bloom, the shining of the inner glory, the high, pure light that illumines the faces of those who for love's sake wear love's holiest crown,—the crown of suffering.

Pencroft, who by virtue of his calling was in daily attendance at the sick woman's bedside, watched with something more than professional solicitude the signs of weariness in the young nurse, and, lover-like, longed to snatch her from these fiery trials, and make her life all brightness and joy. But a Love wiser and tenderer than his had

permitted these trials to come upon her, and he could only be still and wait. Yet his interest in her was constantly betraying itself; and had not Ray been so thoroughly pre-occupied, she might have read it in every word and look. One evening, dropping in unexpectedly, he found her crying over the baby, whom she was rocking to sleep; and going to her side, he laid his hand softly on the rippling brown hair. It was the first caress he had ventured to bestow since the night he kissed her hand before going away, and the impulse to draw the tired head to his bosom was not easily conquered. For a moment Ray bent lower over the sleeping child: then she straightened herself and brushed off the tears, and Pencroft without a word stooped and kissed — the baby, and passed on to the sick-room.

Late in the fall came another letter from Blanche, — merely a line as before, saying that she was well, and that they need not be troubled about her, — and, confident now that she was in Mannaquogue or its vicinity, Donald Keith again entreated permission to begin a systematic search for her. But as Blanche had voluntarily exiled herself, both her father and Ray hesitated to let him undertake it, at least so long as Mrs. Braddington seemed in no immediate danger.

“We will wait a little longer,” said Rachel. “It would be torture for her to be obliged to see poor mamma, day after day, in this wretched state.” And to all appearances the young man

quietly acquiesced in this decision. But as even under frozen seas the living tide still rises and falls, lifting the icy mask with its passionate throbs, beneath his stoical bearing the thought of Blanche, and the longing to find her, kept him in a constant state of unrest. If he could not make an open search, he could at least be on the watch for any chance clew; and invariably, when he found time for a day's tramp, his steps turned in the direction of Mannaquogue. The tall young hunter with his dog and gun became a familiar apparition to the inhabitants of the little village, especially to those who were frequenters of the post-office; for the latter place was his favorite haunt. He would sit by the hour absorbed apparently in a newspaper; but his keen eye noted all who entered, and he would fairly hold his breath, when, as more than once happened, the door opened to admit some slender girlish figure with the face half hidden under a veil; and then, in the re-action from expectancy to disappointment, he would resolutely betake himself to the fields.

"It is folly for us to sit there waiting for something to happen," he said to Vic on one of these occasions; and the next time he went to Mannaquogue he kept aloof from the post-office. So often do men stop just one day short of success! It was a clear, cold day, the last day of the year; and the ground was white with snow. It was owing to this latter circumstance that the young man — when late in the afternoon, after wandering a mile

or two beyond the village, he turned his face toward Crague — failed to discern a dainty cambric handkerchief lying in the road before him. But Vic, his nose more keenly alert than even his master's eyes, caught it up with an eager little bark, and ran capering back. Stooping to take it from him, Keith was greeted with a subtle hint of violets, — so subtle and faint, indeed, as to be almost evanescent, yet for the instant it came near overpowering him ; and when his swift search for a name was rewarded with the discovery of a delicately wrought monogram in the corner, he had no longer a doubt as to whom the handkerchief belonged. It was, of course, possible that some other woman might have both the same initials and a fondness for violet extract ; but he was not in a mood to take such a possibility into consideration. At last he had found a clew, a tangible evidence that she was still somewhere in the neighborhood. Then he suddenly remembered that he had seen shortly before a stage-like-looking vehicle passing that way, and his first impulse was to turn at once and follow it. But the sun was low, and he had already a twelve-miles' walk before him : so, being a sensible man, he kept on toward home.

Late that night he astonished his mother and old Ellis with a request for an early breakfast the next morning, saying that he had pressing work in prospect ; and even the reminder that it would be New Year's Day did not lead him to change his plan.

"In that case I think I will spend the day with Rachel," said Mrs. Keith.

"I wish you would," answered Donald heartily. "I am going in the cutter, and can take you there as well as not, only be ready for an early start."

But he made no mention of the treasure he had found.

CHAPTER XXV.

FROM DARK TO DAWN.

PATIENT waiting is one of life's hardest lessons ; and to wait day after day, week after week, in the presence of a living death, knowing not what the end shall be, is a trial which only those who have experienced it can understand.

The weary-hearted composer at Gullnest Cottage wrote very little music during this time of trial ; for in spite of himself, every thing that he attempted, no matter what the original design might be, took the form of a *miserere*.

"In all noble melody," says Joseph Cook, "there is a suggestion of a melodious final arrangement of human events." And Jerome's perfect faith in this "melodious final arrangement" had sustained him through untold trials ; but under his new weight of woe, he often found himself wondering how any harmonious adjustment of events like these was possible. Never before had his work failed to bring him at least temporary forgetfulness of care ; and though he knew by happy experience that "level roads lead out of music in every direction," his thoughts now had but one trend, all roads alike leading back to his trouble.

The slow, sad days went by in solemn procession. Summer gave place to autumn, and autumn, with her tender, pitying skies, vanished in time like one of her own mist-wreaths; but the changing seasons brought no visible change to Mrs. Braddington. When roused, she would take obediently both food and medicine, but always sank back immediately into the same hopeless lethargy.

"But dere ain't no triberlation dat yo' can't git some comfort out ob," said Dido philosophically; "an' de one comfort ob dis Probidence am dat fo' once in dere libes Marsa Braddington an' Miss Ray kin done hab a little peace."

But to Mr. Braddington and Ray any amount of fretfulness and fault-finding would have been better than such peace as this.

"If we could only be sure that some time she will know us again, it would be so much easier to be patient," moaned Ray, after one of her many ineffectual attempts to win from her mother some sign of recognition.

"We must wait God's time, my darling," said her father, who sat, as he often sat by the hour, chafing the unresponsive hands.

"But God's time is so long in coming!" said the girl wearily.

"But his time is always the right time, daughter. He never makes us wait an hour longer than is needful," he answered, drawing her to him. "It has been a hard strain for my girlie, but she has borne up bravely."

"No harder for me than for you, papa," she said, stroking his beard. "O papa! if God does hear and answer prayer, he will not let poor mamma die in this way. Think how long we have prayed and waited!"

"There is no *if* about it, my child," he answered, with the confidence of one who knew in whom he trusted. "He both hears and answers. Our praying and waiting shall not be in vain."

It was the last night of the year. Mr. Braddington had been up most of the previous night; and Ray, who had fortified herself with a long nap in the afternoon, insisted on watching alone.

"If I need you, papa, I will call you," she said, as he kissed her good-night, after vainly urging her to let him remain. "There is so little to do, that it is not worth while for us both to be broken of our rest."

"If there were more to do, it would be easier to bear," she sighed to herself, feeling that it was not the doing, but the sitting dumb with folded hands, utterly powerless to help the stricken one, that was wearing them out.

At first she sat a while watching the firelight, and listening to the faint breathing of the invalid. The night was clear and cold. A fitful wind sighed through the leafless tree-tops, and kept the dead honeysuckle beating against the window-pane. To the lonely watcher, anxious and overwrought, it had an eerie and unnatural sound; and though she presently took a book, and made a resolute attempt to

absorb herself in reading, she could not shut it out. It was like the whispering and moaning of a wandering spirit, like the persistent rapping of a ghostly hand. Gradually, however, it died away; and in the blessed silence that followed she read on for a time with a sense of new-found rest and peace. But the hush grew deeper and deeper, — a solemn, awful stillness; and closing her book, she went to the window, and drew back the curtain. A full moon made the world glorious, filling all space with light, and outlining on the silvery snow, with the clearness of crayon-sketches, the shadow of every tree and shrub. Hour after hour she sat there, having drawn her chair to the casement, lifted out of herself by the magical beauty of the scene. In the distance the church clock tolled with slow, weird strokes — the only sound that broke the silence — the waning of the night; and steadily in the wondrous calm the moon sailed westward. By and by, in the far east, a tender rose-hued light stole up from behind the hills, spreading and paling until it lost itself in a sea of purest opal; and while she watched, suddenly just over the horizon the morning star flashed out like a blazing jewel on an unseen hand, — the hand that was silently opening the door for the advent of the New Year. Was it an augury of what the year should be, this rosy dawn of its birthday? The falling of a coal on the hearth roused her at last from the contemplation of the outer world, to a consciousness that the room was growing chilly; and having replenished the fire,

she took up her book again. But the enchantment of the night still held her in thrall ; and finding it impossible to fix her thoughts on the printed words, she leaned back in her chair, and waited for the morning. When she opened her eyes some two hours later, though not aware of having slept, she found the room flooded with sunshine, and heard Dido moving about in the kitchen. She was seated between the bed and the window ; and as she raised her head she beheld a strange vision, — her mother's eyes fastened upon her with a look as clear and rational as when in perfect health ; and before she could speak, the white lips had parted with the one word, "Blanche !" uttered interrogatively and with startling distinctness.

To control herself sufficiently to answer in a quiet, natural voice, required an almost superhuman effort.

"Blanche is well, mamma, and she will come home as soon as she knows that you want her," she said gently, at the same time touching the bell-cord that connected with her father's room.

"I want her now," said her mother, with slow but distinct enunciation. At that moment Mr. Braddington entered the room. His wife gave an appealing look into the tender, patient face, and put out her arms like a child that wants to be taken ; and the next instant he was on his knees at the bedside with her head on his shoulder.

Ray stood quivering with suppressed emotion, not daring to ask whether this strange and sudden

return of sanity and speech was the prelude of death or the herald of returning health.

"Kiss me, daughter," said her mother, reaching out her hand; and Ray dropped down beside her father, and pressed kiss after kiss on her wasted face.

"Dear child!" she said in a voice so full of tenderness that Ray's tears, already so near the surface, could no longer be restrained.

"You have had a long sleep, dearest," said her husband.

"All my life I have been asleep, — all my life," she repeated slowly: "I am but just waking up. How patient you have been with me!"

It was their turn to be speechless now. Words utterly failed them; and for the time the only sound in the sick-room was that of subdued weeping, — weeping not in sorrow for the dying, but with joy for the soul that had come back to life. At last Ray had found her mother, — the mother for whom she had yearned and hungered ever since she could remember; at last Jerome Braddington had found his wife.

We all are inclined to rebel, when, in an hour of supreme blessedness, the common things of life intrude themselves; yet the intrusion is sometimes providential. Ray, entranced with her new-found joy, was still kneeling by the bedside with her mother's hand in hers, when the ringing of the breakfast-bell, jarring and unwelcome though it was, reminded her that it was long past the usual

time for the patient to take nourishment. It reminded her, too, that the doctor ought to be advised of the change that had taken place; and stealing from the room, she despatched Silas to the parsonage.

"Wat de matter, Miss Ray?" exclaimed Dido. "Yo' eyes am shinin' like two stars, and yer voice sounds like as if yo' hab good news to tell."

"I have, Dido. Oh, such good news!" said the girl. "Mother has come to herself, and has been talking with us."

"Bress de Lord!" cried Dido, setting down the coffee-pot, and devoutly clasping her sable hands, "dat I should lib to see dis day! But I's mighty feared dat it 'm a fo'runner, chile. Dey does dat putty much allers, — come to an' go to axin' fo'gibness jes' at de berry las' minute, wen it am too late in de day to do dar frien's any good."

"But we think she is really better, Dido: she looks so bright and natural." Dido, however, shook her head dolorously, and reiterated her opinion that it was only a "fo'runner."

Before breakfast was over, Gene had come. Ray met him at the door, her face beaming.

"Has she come? Has Blanche come?" he asked.

"No; but mother has come, Gene. She is herself again, and knows us all." And trembling with eagerness she led him to the sick-room.

Mrs. Braddington returned his greeting with a look of perfect recognition.

"You are better," he said, laying his finger on her pulse.

"Yes, I am better; but I want Blanche. Why doesn't she come?" she asked in a wistful voice.

"She is coming, mamma. We are going to send for her to-day," said Ray quickly; and as soon as Eugene had made his prescription, she drew him aside to consult with him.

"She must be found at once," he said. "I would go myself, if it were not for my patients. Old Mrs. Crosson is very low, and I do not like leaving her. I should be anxious, too, about your mother; for, although she seems so much better, there is a possibility of a re-action, and until we are sure that the change is radical and permanent, she will need close attendance."

"I am the one to go," said Mr. Braddington, who had not till that instant left his wife's bedside. "I will take Silas with me to drive; and if she is anywhere in the vicinity of Mannaquogue, we shall surely find her."

"No, no: father, it will be better for me to go," said Ray. "You are not strong enough for it; and besides, mamma will want you near her."

While they were planning, Donald drew up at the gate, and, after helping his mother out, was about to drive on, when Ray caught sight of him.

"Stop!" cried Gene from the window: "we want your advice." And, hastening in, he was at once admitted to the council.

"Let me go!" he said eagerly. "I am already on my way to Mannaquogue, and I will not come home until I find her." There was no dissent to this proposition.

"I only wish that we had let you go sooner," said Ray, as she wrote her hasty message. And not the faintest suspicion crossed her mind that this was the very errand on which he had started out.

Never did knight-errant set forth more eagerly on his quest. His gun was at his side; but neither bird nor beast, however new or strange, was in any danger of being sacrificed by the young naturalist that morning in the interests of science. His plan was to go first to the Mannaquogue post-office, to see if he could get any information from the post-master.

"Why, yes, I remember the young woman distinct'ly," was the answer to his inquiries some two hours later. "A handsome, high-steppin' sort of girl, and kind o' sad lookin' too. She's been in the office once or twice to mail a letter, but I don't much think she's stoppin' in the village. Come to speak of it, I recollect she took the Quonbasset stage the last time she was here. I remember it more pertic'ly because it was rainy, and she had to wait some time; and my daughter Susan took the stage that same day to go to her aunt's down at Fork Roads. Susan said she tried to be sociable with her, seein' they was both goin' the same way, and they the only passengers; but the young woman didn't seem to be very talkative."

"Did they both get out at the Fork Roads?" asked Keith.

"No: the lady kep' right on, and I rather guess you'll find her somewhere round Quonbasset."

He did not need to ask the distance to Quonbasset, he was familiar with the whole length of the shore ; and he sprang into the sleigh, and gave rein to his horse with the feeling that fortune favored him. Still, the clew was not very definite ; and after passing the Forks, two miles from Mannaquogue, he stopped at every farmhouse to ask if there were any music-teacher in the neighborhood, and smiled grimly to himself at the thought that he would probably be taken for a travelling piano-tuner.

Arriving at Quonbasset without having obtained any additional information, he drove to the hotel, and, after stabling his horse, inquired of the landlord what families in Quonbasset employed a music-teacher.

"I guess there ain't more'n two or three, all told," was the answer. "Most of 'em that can afford to have pianers send their girls away to school ; but there's Mis' Waley's lady boarder, she gives lessons, and Mis' Chauncey Rodman has a young woman teachin' her girls from up the bay somewheres. They ain't very musical anyway in Quon' ; and if you're a pianer agent or any thing of that sort, I'm afraid you won't get no great encouragement."

"Where do these ladies live?" asked the young man, as he jotted down the names. And having been directed to "the big yellow house by the church," and "the white house down by the shore," he hastened off. For some reason which he could never explain satisfactorily to himself, he decided

to call first on Mrs. Waley ; and, thinking that in all probability Blanche was teaching under an assumed name, he put on a bold face, and asked to see the music-teacher.

"It is Miss Goland you want?" said the girl who had admitted him. "Oh, there she is now!" she exclaimed as a short, stout figure in eye-glasses appeared at the other end of the hall.

"I beg pardon," said Keith hastily. "I see that I have made a mistake;" and before the lady could reach the door he had gained the street, the contrast between Miss Goland and Blanche forcing a grim smile to his lips in spite of his disappointment. Disappointed he was indeed, yet it was with no feeling of discouragement that he turned in the direction of the yellow house by the church. Even if failure awaited him here, he had no intention of abandoning the search. It was Mrs. Rodman herself who admitted him, and having heard his request she at once invited him into the parlor. A tall, slight woman, in a black dress, who was standing by the window as he entered, turned hastily at the sound of his voice, and was about to leave the room ; but he had already seen and recognized her.

"Wait a moment," he said with grave authority. "I am the bearer of sad news." And he handed her Ray's letter. It was a passionate entreaty for her to come home, telling her that ever since the night she went away her mother had been hovering between life and death, and that now at last she had returned to consciousness, and was asking for

her. Blanche read it with dilating eyes, and with her hands in such a tremble that it was a hard matter to hold the paper.

"Sit down," said Donald, placing a chair for her; and Mrs. Rodman, seeing that this was evidently a trouble with which a stranger had no call to meddle, went out and shut the door behind her.

"O Donald! Why did they not let me know sooner?" gasped Blanche.

"How could they when you yourself had deliberately cut them off from all communication with you?" he said coldly. "But come! There is not a moment to waste. My horse is at the hotel, and by the time you are ready I will be here for you."

She looked up at him with a white, scared face.

"How can I go?" she moaned. "What if I should find her dead? O my God, it is more than I can bear!"

"They thought her symptoms favorable this morning," said Donald, finding it hard to steady his voice in his longing to comfort her. "Her life depends on your going, and I shall not leave the place without you," he added in tones which his effort to control himself made unnecessarily stern.

"Oh, I am coming, I am coming!" she cried, starting to her feet. "I will not keep you waiting. I will be ready in a moment."

How easily it had been accomplished, after all, he said to himself as he hastened back to the hotel. And to think that all this time she had been so near them! Why, more than once in his tramps he had

been in sight of Quonbasset; and he ground his teeth at the thought of his own stupidity in not having improved his opportunities to make inquiries in spite of Ray's injunction.

When he returned he found Blanche ready and waiting, a brief explanation in regard to her mother's illness having sufficed to satisfy Mrs. Rodman.

"But we shall hope to have you back, Miss Roslyn, as soon as your mother is well again," the lady said as she expressed her regret and sympathy.

"I hardly think Miss Roslyn's friends will consent to her return," said Donald, answering for her as he helped her into the sleigh. And Mrs. Rodman bade them farewell without the remotest suspicion that Blanche had any other name than that by which she had known her.

"Now tell me about mother," Blanche entreated, as soon as she found courage to speak.

"The most there is to tell, you know already," said Donald; and in that same hard voice he repeated the story.

"Poor father and Ray! How have they endured it?" she asked.

"As only such souls are capable of enduring," he answered, with an emphasis that showed in what high esteem he held them.

There were other questions she was eager to ask, but something in his manner awed her. Had it been Gene, she would have asked about her boy, for she was hungry to hear about him; the longing to see him, to hold him in her arms again, had been

growing upon her for months, and more than once had nearly drawn her back to Crague in spite of herself. But she could not summon courage to speak of him to Donald; and lowering her veil she sat silent, not daring to lift her eyes to the accusing face beside her. Donald was equally unsociable; for in his present mood it was impossible to talk on indifferent matters, and that which was uppermost in his mind was a tabooed subject. Could he have broached that theme, there would have been no lack of words; for with all his apparent sternness, the thought that she was sitting there beside him, — the woman whom all these years he had loved with a passion that had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength, — was thrilling him with so exultant a sense of gladness that it required a strong hand to hold it in check.

The westering sun shed a warm and subdued light on the snowy landscape, the bells tinkled merrily, and the horse's hoofs seemed scarcely to touch the ground. It was a royal day for a pleasure ride; and the farmers, plodding on with their heavy sleds, looked after the sleigh as it passed, with the mental conclusion that its occupants were on their way to some New-Year festival; but no ripple of talk or laughter mingled with the music of the bells, and more than once the horse turned his splendid head as if wondering at his master's silence.

At last Blanche gathered courage to speak, but it was in a shy, broken voice, —

“Donald, can you forgive me?”

"Forgive you for what?" he asked in a constrained tone.

"For every thing, Donald. I have been so cruel and selfish. I see it all now."

The young man drew his breath between set teeth, and the hand on the reins trembled visibly.

"Yes," he said coldly, "you have been cruel and selfish, Blanche."

"Yet love

Shot, like a stifled cry of tenderness,
All through the harshness he would fain have given
To the dear word."

But Blanche heard only the stinging reproof.

"Have I sinned past forgiveness?" she asked presently.

"What difference does it make whether I forgive you or not, so long as we can be nothing to each other?" he said in the same voice.

"We can be friends once more, can we not, Donald? That is all I can ever be to any one now, at least while — while" —

Donald finished the sentence for her.

"While that man lives?" he said hoarsely. "Why should he separate us? God knows he has wronged us enough already," he cried, with a half-formed curse on his lips; but he checked himself abruptly. Long ago he had determined that he would never thrust his love upon her, that he would wait until he was sure that she was ready to respond. That she was not yet ready, was very evident; and

he felt that to compel her to listen to him would be taking an ungenerous advantage.

They were nearing Crague. He would not add to her burden by parting from her in seeming anger.

"Forgive me. I am the one that is cruel and selfish," he said; "yet if even as your friend I might bear your troubles for you, O Blanche, how gladly would I do it!"

She shook her head sorrowfully. "No one can bear them for me. I have sinned, and I must suffer; but others must suffer with me — that is the hardest part of it," she said, with a new and keen realization that no man sins to himself alone.

There was no time for Donald to reply. They were at the gate, and Gene was there waiting for them; but Donald leaped from the sleigh, and lifted Blanche out before Gene could reach them. Blanche did not speak; but she threw back her veil as she gave her hand to Gene, and looked up at him with a mute appeal which he was quick to apprehend.

"She is better," he said; "but just now she is sleeping, and Ray wants you to have supper before seeing her. She says you must come too, Donald."

It was the first time it had occurred to Donald that he had eaten nothing since morning; but he excused himself, saying that if his mother was ready to go home he preferred not to stop.

"I would rather your mother would not go just yet," said Eugene in an undertone. "It is hard to tell what effect the meeting will have on Mrs. Braddington, and she may be needed."

"Then I will stay," said Donald; and having blanketed his horse, he followed his friend to the house. As they entered the hall they caught sight of Blanche folded in her father's arms, with Ray clinging to her hand; and feeling that it was a tableau to which they had no right to be spectators, they turned into the dining-room.

"You made a quick trip," said Gene. "We had hardly dared to look for you to-night." And while they waited, Donald gave him in as few words as possible the history of his search.

"We have acted like idiots in not looking for her sooner," he said.

"It is better as it is," answered Gene. "It would have been torture to her, to have had to witness her mother's pitiable condition all these months, and know that she was the cause of it."

"You have no right to accuse her of being the cause of it," said Donald hotly. "For all you know to the contrary, it might have happened just the same, even if she had not gone away."

"Perhaps so," said Gene, seeing that he was in a mood that would not bear contradiction — a mood, he said to himself, which might readily be excused in a man who had fasted all day; and at that moment Ray joined them, saying that Blanche was resting, and would not be down at present.

Dido had a sumptuous supper in readiness.

"Wat de use ob habbin' a fortin' left yo' ef yo' ain't a-gwine to take de good ob it?" she had said to Silas Crane. "Marsa Braddington an' Miss

Ray am so took up wid dere triberlations dat dey doesn't make no mo' account ob dere good luck dan ef dey was rich as Cresums to begin wid; an' ef we can't do nuffin' else to show dat de family am lookin' up, I's gwine to hab an impruberment in de table," a proposition to which Silas, who was fond of a good bill of fare, had no objections to offer.

"We ain't done got no fatted calf," Dido said to Ray; "but if Miss Ban kum to-night, we'll gib her de best de law allows." And it was a serious disappointment to the faithful creature, that Blanche was not able to show her appreciation of the welcome she had prepared for her. In fact, Donald was the only one who did justice to her viands, and he was hungry enough to have eaten mush and milk with a relish. Ray made an attempt to bear him company; but presently, having asked Mrs. Keith to preside, she excused herself from the table, and went to Blanche, carrying with her a well-filled tray.

She found Blanche as she had left her, sitting in the low rocker with the baby in her arms, — the arms that had been so long empty and hungry.

"Come, dear, put him down now, and have some tea," she said, drawing a stand to her side: "mother will be waking soon, and it will not do to keep her waiting."

"O Ray! I will never leave him again," she said, taking the tea, but keeping the child on her lap: "no one knows how I have wanted the darling. If ever I go away again, he shall go with me."

"But you never will, Ban!" cried Ray, putting

her arms about them both ; "not unless you want to break our hearts outright. Oh ! promise me, Ban, that you will never think of going again."

"If mother lives to forgive me, Ray," she said tearfully, "I will stay, however hard it may be, if only to prove my repentance."

There was a rap at the door, and Mrs. Keith entered.

"Your mother is awake, and is asking for you," she said, taking the baby.

"Come with me, Ray," said Blanche, grasping her sister's hand ; and the two went down together.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HAPPY FAMILY.

MRS. BRADDINGTON, lying with closed lids, looked so white and wasted that one could easily have believed that she was taking her last sleep; but before Blanche reached the bedside she had opened her eyes, and stretched out her arms. There was a long and close embrace, followed with a few broken sentences, and the mother and daughter were at peace with each other.

An hour later Dr. Pencroft looked in with an air of professional solicitude; but Mrs. Braddington was sleeping quietly with Blanche's hand in hers, while Mr. Braddington and Ray sat looking on in speechless content.

"We shall not be wanted to-night," he said, returning to the library where Mrs. Keith and Donald were waiting for his report; and without disturbing the re-united family, they quietly took their departure.

It was late in the evening before it occurred to the little company in the sick-room that any of them needed rest.

"Come, daughters," said Mr. Braddington at

last, "you are both tired, and I am going to watch to-night." Blanche entreated that she might be allowed to stay in his stead, but he would not consent to it.

"When you are rested, darling, you may take your turn," he said, with a tenderness that brought the tears to her eyes, and filled her anew with remorse: but gratitude that her mother was spared overpowered all other feelings for the time; and, reaching her room, she threw herself on her knees by the baby's crib, and poured out the first genuine prayer of thanksgiving that she had ever offered.

Ray, following a little later, stopped for a moment by the window at the head of the stairs, and looked out at the sky. It was the same sky that had entranced her the previous night, when its still beauty had been like a prophecy of peace. To-night it seemed to her the assurance of the prophecy fulfilled; and when she finally laid her head on the pillow, it was with the feeling that a new year had indeed begun.

The next morning Silas Crane came in with a letter for Ray.

"Why, that is one I wrote you the day before yesterday, going myself to Mannaquogue to mail it, and losing my handkerchief on the way," exclaimed Blanche. She did not see fit to add that once during the ride she had started forward with an almost uncontrollable impulse to stop the stage, at sight of a soldierly-looking man, with a gun on his shoulder and a dog at his side, striding through

a distant stubble-field ; but she kept the picture in her memory.

Mrs. Braddington's recovery, dating from that eventful New Year's Day, went on steadily ; and though it was weeks before she could leave her room, in less than a fortnight she was able to begin to sit up for a short time in the afternoon : and always at that hour the baby was brought in to be petted ; for she had asked for him the morning after Blanche's return, and had taken him at once to her heart. Another evidence of a radical change was her desire to have the family about her. Instead of secluding herself, as had been her habit for months before her illness, she would beg them all to come sit with her ; and the room which had formerly been as gloomy as a convent-cell was gradually transformed into the most inviting place in the house. Here in the lengthening afternoons the girls sat with their books and needle-work, with the baby at their feet ; and here, at her own request, the family gathered morning and evening for prayers. She was, as she herself had said, like one just awaking from a life-long sleep. Love, the magician, had anointed her eyes, revealing her to both herself and others in a new light. For the first time in her life she had become conscious of her consuming selfishness ; for the first time in her life she comprehended clearly her husband's steadfast devotion to her, and Ray's years of loving service ; and it was through this comprehension of the human love that had so tenderly borne with her

infirmities, that she had gained her first glimpse of the love which "passeth understanding." To those about her, the softened voice and the growing patience and gentleness were constant surprises. A new atmosphere pervaded the house, and its effects were soon apparent. The worn, sad look that had become habitual to Mr. Braddington gave place to an expression of restfulness and peace; even Blanche yielded to its influence, and grew cheerful and girlish again; and in this "sweet pause of troubles," conscious of treasure-trove more precious than silver and gold, they scarcely remembered that a fortune had been left them. But as the spring advanced, and the balmy air began to entice the invalid out of doors, there were whispered conferences between her husband and Ray, two or three mysterious letters were despatched to the New-York agent; and "the consequence was," that one afternoon a pony and carriage in want of an owner arrived at Gullnest; and as Mrs. Braddington was the first to catch sight of them, they were unanimously declared hers by right of discovery. .

"Well, girlie, we have made a beginning, now what next?" said Mr. Braddington, as Ray patted the pony and expressed her satisfaction.

"That depends on the amount of funds on hand," answered Ray.

"There is a check for a thousand dollars in the desk," said her father; "and you can do whatever you like with it."

Then this hitherto provident young woman was

suddenly seized with a mania for spending money.

"First of all we'll abolish cracked china," she said gayly. "Poor mamma shall no longer have to endure the sight of chipped cups and saucers."

Then new carpets, soft and subdued, took the places of the worn and faded fabrics which year after year she had pieced and darned with inexhaustible patience: the heavy old-fashioned chairs and sofas were newly upholstered; and up stairs and down, the rooms were freshly papered and painted.

Mrs. Braddington looked on with smiling approval; and when on her return from a visit to the parsonage, where she had been persuaded, for the first time in years, to spend the day, she found her own room converted into a sort of fairy bower, she was like a child in her surprise and delight.

The re-organization of the library, however, came near proving a failure. Blanche and Ray undertook it together one day when their father had accepted an invitation from Gene to go with him to Cliff Haven; and by the time he returned, they had every thing arranged to their minds.

"It is beautiful! beautiful!" he said heartily at the first glance; and his daughters, who had waited his verdict with something of fear and trembling, congratulated themselves on their success. But the moment the door closed, and he found himself alone, he groaned aloud. It was not the carpet with its quiet neutral tints that distressed him,

neither was it the fresh wall-paper with its delicate tracery of vine and leaf: these were pleasant to him. But his desk was at the wrong window; his marble Milton, in whose blind orbs he had found sympathy and strength, had changed niches with Shakspeare; and from the bracket from which Mendelssohn's seraphic face had smiled, Beethoven, deep in thought, frowned down upon him. For a day or two he managed to endure it, but he could not work.

"I am not quite used to it yet," he said, when Ray, seeing his restlessness, ventured to express a fear that the changes were not altogether satisfactory. "The truth is, deary, I am growing old; and the old cannot readily adapt themselves to new surroundings."

"Now, papa, that is a libel on yourself! Why, you are growing younger every day," she answered laughingly. But to herself she said with a sigh, "I was afraid it would be so." And the next day, while her father and mother were out driving, desk, busts, and pictures went back to their old places.

"Ah! this is perfect," he murmured, dropping into his chair with a satisfied smile that amply repaid the girl for her trouble: "it leaves nothing to be desired." But more than once that evening Ray found his eyes fixed on her, as if some vexing question in regard to herself had taken possession of him.

"My dear little woman," he suddenly exclaimed the next morning at the breakfast-table, before

Mrs. Braddington and Blanche had joined them, "you have not yet bought any thing for yourself."

"Why, it is all for me! I am just revelling in it," cried the girl, holding up a dainty china cup, and inspecting it with the satisfaction of a connoisseur.

But Braddington was confident that there were certain luxuries for which she herself was hungering, for which she had made no appropriation; and a few days later, finding that Dr. Pencroft was going to town, he gave him a commission to execute, having first held so long a consultation with him that Ray was really alarmed.

"Are you ill, papa?" she asked.

"Not in the least," he said smilingly. And the mystery was not cleared up until the following week, when a box of books and a baker's dozen of exquisite etchings and engravings arrived.

"How could you know how I wanted them?" she cried.

"I have known all about it this many a day, sweetheart," he answered with his arm about her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SHIP ASHORE.

DURING all this time, the house in town had scarcely been mentioned. Mr. Braddington, feeling unwilling to lease it furnished, had persuaded Mrs. Hedgway to occupy it until such time as the family might see fit to take possession of it; and though she had written more than once asking when she might expect them, no decision had yet been reached.

"Perhaps by next fall mamma may consent to go," said Ray. "Papa needs a holiday, and the change would do all of us good."

"You must not include me," said Blanche with quiet decision. "You can go with father and mother, and leave me to keep house here."

Ray understood, and for the time the subject was dropped; but she still secretly cherished the hope, that even if her mother and Blanche refused to go, her father might be prevailed upon to take his long-talked-of vacation.

Mrs. Braddington's improvement, meanwhile, went on steadily; and Dr. Pencroft declared that it was largely due to her daily ride to the beach.

One day, on returning from one of these drives, she reported, with a new and growing interest in common things, that the beach-plums were ripening in abundance.

"I am glad of that," said Ray: "there were so few last year."

"How long it is since we last went beach-plumming!" said Gene, who had stopped to leave a book. "Why can't we go some pleasant day? It would seem like old times."

In Blanche's mind, beach-plumming was always associated with that autumn day when she made her final decision to "gang her ain gait." Still, rather than mar Ray's pleasure, she consented to go. Donald, too, though beach-plumming held for him also some unhappy reminiscences, yielded to Ray's sweet urgency; and the next afternoon they all set out for the beach. It was the same party, with the exception of young Drome, that three years before had gathered round Ray's lunch-table under the shadow of the sand-dunes; but to some of them it seemed as if a lifetime had intervened. Ray was the only one who was thoroughly happy, not excepting even Della Pencroft; that placid young woman, owing to her disappointment in Alva Drome, being in a somewhat pensive mood. For the youth in question, having on the spur of the minister's arbitrary proposition persuaded his father to send him to a commercial college, had returned to Crague after a six-months' absence, carrying a gold-headed cane and wearing three new charms on his watch-guard;

and as these were the only manifest results of the experiment, Mr. Pencroft had felt justified in declining to regard him as his future son-in-law; and though the young man in the first heat of his disappointment had threatened to throw himself to the fishes, he had on reflection concluded that so far as fish were concerned, it was preferable to be the consumer rather than the consumed; and on the strength of this conclusion he had returned to his piscatory habits. And Della, while admitting the wisdom of her father's decision, had really liked the "nice" young man too well to give him up without a sigh.

As for the doctor, he was still puzzling over his riddle. That Donald had no thought for any one but Blanche, he was at last thoroughly convinced; but he was still unable to determine in which direction Ray's preference tended, and he mentally resolved to have the question settled that very day if possible.

The plums were abundant, and at the end of two hours every basket was full. In the mean time Blanche kept as near as practicable to Della; while Donald, with equal persistency, kept so close to Ray that all Gene's efforts to have her for a moment to himself were futile.

The early part of the day had been fair, but before the afternoon was half over there was every indication of an approaching storm. Great banks of clouds shut out the sun, and the sea broke on the shore in long, sullen billows; while the wind,

which was steadily increasing, sent the light sand whirling through the gorges like drifting snow.

"We must be starting soon, or we shall be caught in the rain," said Donald.

A life-saving station had recently been established in the neighborhood; and, though it had been unoccupied through the summer, the keeper, living near and always on the alert when a storm was brewing, had called together such of his men as were within reach, and set them to practising with the hawsers and mortars.

"Are you expecting a blow, captain?" asked Pencroft as the party stopped to watch the process.

"There's no tellin', sir," was the answer. "It's goin' to be a rough night, and like as not there'll be a vessel ashore before mornin'."

"Wouldn't you like some help in that case?" asked Donald. "We landsmen would like to see how you manage these things when a storm is on."

"Come along, then. You're welcome to come, providin' you keep out o' the way," said the captain as he turned to direct his men.

"What do you say, Gene?" said Donald. "Suppose we go home and equip ourselves, and come back for the night."

Pencroft accepted the proposition at once. "It is an opportunity I have been waiting for this many a day," he said.

"Ladies are not admitted, I suppose," said Ray regretfully.

"I reckon they wouldn't want to be admitted

more'n once," answered a surfman who stood near hauling in a hawser. "One such storm as we have here sometimes would cure you, Miss, of ever wantin' to see another, 'specially if there happened to be a shipwreck at the same time."

Blanche gave a little shudder.

"It must be a terrible sight," said Ray, as they took up their baskets, the increasing gloom warning them that the sooner they reached home the better.

Now at last he should have an opportunity to speak with her, Gene said to himself as he fell in step with the girl; but while plodding through the sand-drifts with the wind fairly taking the words from his mouth, it was an impossibility to introduce the subject that was occupying his thoughts; and before they reached the level road, Blanche had joined them, leaving Della and Donald to entertain each other.

"I don't quite like the expedition that you and Donald have planned," she said with real anxiety in her voice. "You are both so reckless that there is no knowing what danger you will be rushing into."

Eugene, in spite of his disappointment in having to forego his talk with Ray, laughed in a kindly way at her fears, and assured her that he had no expectation of any thing very exciting. "It is hardly late enough in the season for a very damaging gale," he said; "and the probability is that we shall spend the greater part of the night in the mess-room, reading and telling yarns." But for

himself, not even this approach to an adventure was in store ; for on reaching the parsonage, he found an urgent call awaiting him from a patient living a mile beyond the Point. For Donald there was nothing to do but to abandon the enterprise, or go alone ; and he characteristically decided on the latter course, having no disposition to turn back, though the wind had grown to a tempest, and splashes of rain were already falling.

"It is going to be a terrific night," said the minister, following him to the door, and taking a survey of the sky.

"The more terrific it is, the less I should like to miss it," answered Keith, involuntarily repeating to himself a stanza from "*Excelsior* ;" and having borrowed a rubber overcoat, he started on his tramp, Gene having promised to leave word with his mother concerning his plan. It was a rough journey ; the road, already heavy, being scarcely visible in the rapidly increasing darkness, while the violence of the wind made it a difficult matter for him to keep his feet, and before he had gone half the distance the rain began to fall in torrents. Fond as he was of toilsome enterprises, he was glad when he came in sight of the station.

"We didn't much think you'd put in an appearance in the teeth of this gale," said the keeper, as the adventurous traveller presented himself, bare-headed, and with the rain running in brooklets from his shoulders to his feet.

"It is a pretty stiff breeze," he answered. "It

didn't quite take my head off, but I was obliged to tuck my hat into my pocket. What's the prospect, captain?"

"The prospect is," said the keeper, taking his pipe from his mouth, and crossing his legs, "the prospect is that it's goin' to be a mighty squally night. There's a tremendous sea on, and if there's any vessels nigh shore they'll be likely to feel it; but then, 'tain't very easy to say. Mabbe by midnight it'll all be as clear as a bell, and then agin mabbe it won't. It's hard calkerlatin' on the weather with any degree o' sartinty."

Three or four of the men were sitting about the room, reading and smoking; and Keith, having thrown off his wet overcoat, picked up a book, and joined them.

The storm waxed fiercer, the wind driving the sand like fine hail against the windows; and at times it almost seemed as if the building would be lifted from its foundations.

Toward midnight, however, there was a temporary lull; and one of the patrolmen, returning from his beat, reported that there were no vessels in sight.

"If you don't mind having company, I think I'll take a turn with you," said Keith, as two fresh men started out on patrol.

"The more the merrier, mister," said one of the men. "'Tain't very invitin' outside; but if you don't care to go to bunk, I ain't sure but you'll enjoy it better'n you would sittin' round here with nothin' to do."

They had scarcely left the station when the tempest began again, and with increased fury. Keith had often seen the sea in a storm, but never when it was like this. The billows, a chain of moving mountains, came towering inland, filling the air with clouds of feathery spray, which, like flocks of sea-birds driven before the wind, dashed over the heads and into the faces of those on shore, at times nearly blinding them, while the commingled roar of wind and breakers seemed to rend the heavens; but though drenched and panting, the two men struggled on until they met the patrol from the next station.

"It's kind o' fierce, but I reckon after all we're goin' to get through the night without havin' to haul out the boats," said the patrolman, as they turned to retrace their steps; but a moment later Keith struck his foot against an empty cask; and a short distance farther on, a broken spar lay across their way.

"Hi! that means trouble!" exclaimed his companion, striking a hand-light. Instantly a red glow shot up through the darkness like a pillar of flame, and scarcely had it died out when there came booming over the water the well-known signal of a ship in distress.

"Up with you! up!" cried the guard, rushing into the station-house. "There's a ship comin' ashore!"

Every man was at once on his feet, and the keeper's orders were executed with the swiftness and accuracy which only those trained to the service

can exercise. Keith fairly held his breath as the preparations went forward; and when the last carriage was wheeled out, seeing that another man was needed, he sprang to the harness exulting in the thought that he himself might perhaps be instrumental in saving a life.

“No boat can live in a sea like this,” cried the keeper; and after two or three ineffectual attempts to launch the surf-boat, they found that it would be necessary to bring out the mortar-cart. Once more Keith came to their help, pulling and pushing with the strength of a young giant; and presently a hawser went whizzing through the darkness. But again and again the rocket fell short of the mark, and an hour passed before any response could be obtained. Then it was found that the stranded vessel was a steamer bound for Havana, with fifty souls on board. The saving of them was a perilous undertaking; but the surfmen were accustomed to peril, and showed no signs of fear. Hours passed before all were brought ashore; and meanwhile the storm had so far subsided, that Keith had managed to kindle a fire on one of the highest of the sand-dunes. The flickering blaze threw a weird light over the scene; and as he paused for a moment to contemplate it, he discovered a human figure left high on the beach by a receding billow. Before he could reach it, another breaker had hurled it back into the sea; and intent on saving a life, and confident of his own powers as a swimmer, he plunged in after it. But he had underrated the might of

the waves: they surged about him like demons, fierce for their prey. Even when at last he succeeded in planting his feet on the sand with the rescued man in his arms, the undertow swept up and sucked him back. From first to last it was a desperate struggle, but through it all he managed to keep his hold on his inanimate burden; and though there were no signs of life, the moment the station was reached, he set himself to the work of resuscitation.

“No use wasting your time on him,” said a looker-on; but Donald, persevering, presently had the satisfaction of finding that his patient was beginning to breathe; but the left arm was badly fractured, and there were several severe bruises on the head and chest. Some of the rescued passengers had seen the man on shipboard; but none of them knew any thing about him beyond the fact that he seemed to be travelling for his health, and had no friends with him.

“What he needs is a surgeon, and the sooner he has one the better,” said one of the patrolmen. The station-house was crowded almost to suffocation, and every farmhouse in the vicinity had taken in one or more of the sufferers. There was not a place where he could be made comfortable; and, deciding that the wisest thing to do was to take him at once to the Point, Donald, securing one of the farm-wagons that had been brought to the beach to aid in carrying the shipwrecked people to the neighboring homes, quickly converted it into an ambu-

lance, and, accompanied by the owner, set out on his journey.

"Ha' you coom wi' a wagon-load of beach-plooms, Mr. Donald?" asked Ellis, as the vehicle drove to the door in the gray of the morning.

"Not exactly, Ellis; at least, it is not the sort of beach-plum that I had expected to bring home," answered Donald, as they carried the stranger in.

On the way he had despatched a messenger for Gene; and Gene, a little later, reined in his horse at Gullnest, and left word that there had been a shipwreck, and that Donald had brought one of the rescued passengers to the Point.

"We must drive over after breakfast, and offer our services," said Ray; and as it was earlier than either her mother or Blanche cared to ride, her father went with her.

"None of the passengers, I believe, sustained any injuries, with the exception of the poor man in yonder," said Mrs. Keith, nodding toward the "parlor bedroom." "The doctor has just been setting his arm; but I am afraid he has received some internal hurt, for his mind seems to be wandering. Donald is with him now. Go in, if you choose, dear. I will be there in a moment." And Rachel, acting on this suggestion, rapped softly at the door.

"You need have no fear of disturbing him," said Donald, as he admitted her. "He is under the influence of opiates, and will be likely to sleep some hours."

"Poor fellow!" she said, going toward the bed. "I wonder if he has any friends."

The man was lying with his face to the wall, and as Ray leaned over him she gave a stifled scream.

"What is it? He is not dead?" said Keith quickly; for she had turned toward him with her features convulsed with horror.

"Donald! Donald! do you know who this man is whom you have brought into your house?" she cried. The young man was standing by the table with one of Pencroft's surgical instruments in his hand; and as he comprehended her meaning, a sudden madness leaped into his eyes.

"*That man!*" he hissed through his clinched teeth, dashing toward the bed with the knife uplifted. But Ray threw herself before him, and caught his arm.

"Stop, Donald! stop! Would you murder a man who is already so near to death?" she cried. For an instant he struggled to free himself: then his hand dropped to his side, and the fire died out of his eyes.

"God forgive me, but that man and I cannot live under the same roof," he said hoarsely, and rushed staggering from the room. Ray followed close behind him.

"What ails you two?" asked Mrs. Keith, meeting her at the door. "Is the man worse, or have you seen a wraith?"

"O Mrs. Keith!" cried Ray, throwing herself into Mrs. Keith's motherly arms, "don't you know,

Mrs. Keith, that he — that man — is Otis Gilder-man!"

For a moment she gazed at the girl in blank astonishment.

"Nevertheless, dear, we must treat him Christianly," she said at last; but Ray, breaking away from her, ran out to the gate, where her father was waiting for her, and sprang into the carriage.

"Did you see our patient?" asked Pencroft, who had been chatting with Mr. Braddington.

"Yes, I saw him," she answered in a voice that was like steel; and, as she spoke, she gave the pony a touch with the whip that sent him off on a trot, leaving the young doctor at a loss to account for her strange mood. When he re-entered the house, however, Mrs. Keith speedily enlightened him.

"Where is Donald?" was his first question. But neither Mrs. Keith nor Ellis could tell where Donald was; and, after giving such directions as he thought necessary, he reluctantly took leave, promising to return as soon as he had seen his other patients. "And I must telegraph to his friends," he said as he mounted Boreas.

All that day and the following night, Mrs. Keith kept watch for Donald; but he did not come. Still, she was not alarmed. "He will come when he has fought it out," she said to herself; and when at the end of the second day he walked in, white and haggard, and with a look in his eyes that some of his friends found hard to interpret, she welcomed him without a question.

"Coom now, Mr. Donald, sit ye doon and eat," said the faithful Ellis, with her broad Scotch accent. "Ye'r gang clane daft roonin' after the wracks." But Mrs. Keith knew that he had been in the wilderness, tempted of the Devil; and she believed that he had come off conqueror.

"I will watch to-night," he said to Pencroft, who had established himself as night nurse.

"Not alone?" said Gene apprehensively, something in Donald's face filling him with a vague uneasiness; and though Donald did not seem to care for company, he insisted on remaining, saying that he would sleep on the lounge.

"It is always better to have two in a case like this," he said; and while Mrs. Keith went to her pillow with a burden lifted from her heart, he lay the greater part of the night with half-closed eyes watching the watcher.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DEAD FOE.

AS a nurse, Donald seemed faithfulness itself, adhering strictly to directions, and moving about the bed with the gentleness of a woman. Had he really conquered himself, Gene wondered, and was he going through with this fierce ordeal simply to test his strength? Or was he cherishing some evil design, unconfessed, perhaps, even to his own heart? He watched him closely hour after hour, but the look on Donald's face did not seem that of one who meditated vengeance; and he had nearly become convinced that his anxiety was groundless, when he heard the sick man muttering to himself, and, as he started up to listen, he saw Donald bending over the bed, his eyes flaming, and his hands working convulsively.

"God help us!" he ejaculated in a whisper, wondering in what way he could best turn the madman from his purpose; but the next instant Donald had fallen on his knees, and buried his face in his hands; and Eugene, no longer fearing for him, turned on his pillow and presently dropped asleep.

When he awoke it was morning; and the sight of Donald's white face — its whiteness all the more

marked by contrast with its rugged strength — brought back in a flash the scene of the previous night. Involuntarily he glanced toward the bed. The sick man was sleeping peacefully.

"Come, old fellow," he said, rising and stretching himself: "it is time for you to turn in now. This wrecking business has been a hard strain on you." As he spoke, he put out his hand; and as Donald took it within his own, they looked straight into each other's eyes.

"Ay, Gene, it has nearly wrecked my soul," he said huskily.

"But not quite, not quite, thank God," answered Gene; and for an instant there was a close embrace like that of two women.

"Now go up to your room, and go to bed," said Gene with professional authority. "Merely throwing yourself down will not give you half the rest you need." And Donald, obeying, was soon lost in the sleep that comes from utter exhaustion of body and mind.

He had been gone but a short time when the patient, rousing from his trance-like slumber, lifted his head, and fixed his eyes on Pencroft with a look of returning reason.

"Where am I?" he asked sharply. "The captain said this was Crague, and I swam ashore. Where is Blanche? Blanche lives at Crague, and I must see her. Do you know Blanche?"

"Yes, I know her; but I hardly think she can see you, Mr. Gilderman," said the doctor gently.

"But she must! She shall!" he cried excitedly. "Tell her that I am dying, and that I cannot die in peace until she forgives me."

"But you are not dying, Mr. Gilderman; and if you will keep yourself quiet I think you will soon be better," answered Pencroft.

"I tell you I am dying," he reiterated almost angrily: "I have been dying for months." And at the same instant, as if in confirmation of his words, a stream of blood gushed from his lips.

It was some moments before the hemorrhage could be checked; and Eugene had just succeeded in administering an opiate when Mrs. Keith came to the door, bringing him a cup of hot coffee.

"Is your patient worse?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, giving her a brief account of what had occurred; "but he will be likely to remain quiet for some time now; and if you can stay with him, I will go to deliver his message."

It was with serious misgivings that he mounted his horse, and started for Gullnest.

The man was nearer death than he had thought; but even if he were dying, would Blanche be willing to come to him?

It was scarcely sunrise: and as he traversed the lonely road, the crisp air sent the blood tingling through his veins, and filled him with a new and happy consciousness of youth and vigor; but mingled with it was a feeling of genuine pity for the wretched man whom he had just left.

"How is it to end, I wonder, this strange and

dreary affair?" he said to himself; and the only answer was the sighing of the wind through the cedars.

The sound of his horse's hoofs as he galloped to the gate brought Ray to the door, and her face grew pale as he told his errand.

"Is Donald there?" she asked anxiously.

"Donald watched with him last night," he answered.

"I am afraid it was not quite wise to let him do it," she said cautiously.

"I think it was," he said with confidence.

"Donald has slain his dragon, Ray."

"I have not slain mine," she exclaimed almost fiercely. "I feel like a murderer, Gene, I have so hated that man."

"If there were time, I would preach you a sermon," he said, covering with his own the hand with which she had been unconsciously stroking his horse's mane. "It is not a time to cherish hate. Can you not overcome your repugnance enough to persuade Blanche to see him, that so far as she is concerned the poor man may die absolved?"

"I am afraid I shall not succeed," she said: "it will be such a shock to her."

"But of course you have told her who the man is," said Gene.

"I have done nothing of the kind," she said quickly. "I thought he would soon be able to go away, and that she need never know that he had been in the neighborhood. Do you really think he is dying, Gene?"

"I think he has not many days to live," he answered.

"I will go tell her," she said in a softened voice. Gene watched her as she went up the steps.

"My darling!" he said to himself, "it is hard for her too." But Ray was thinking only of Blanche, and wondering how she could best break the news. Blanche neither screamed nor swooned, but her face grew stony as she listened.

"Tell Eugene that it is impossible," she said coldly.

"But you must go, Ban," said Ray decisively. "I will go with you. I know it is like asking you to walk over live coals, but I hope we are not such heathen as to refuse to forgive a man that is dying. Come, let me tell Gene that you will go."

Blanche made no answer; and taking silence for consent, she ran to the window, and called to Gene that they would go as soon as they had breakfasted. Then suddenly remembering that he had probably not yet broken his fast, she invited him to come in and breakfast with them. But he was too anxious about his patient to stop to eat.

"O Ray! how can I go?" said Blanche piteously.

"Any thing that must be done can be done," said Ray with quiet emphasis. "Come, dear, don't stop to think about it. The breakfast-bell has rung." And putting her arm about her sister, she drew her with her. But neither of them could do more than swallow a cup of coffee; and Ray, having already explained the case to their father,

hurried Blanche off without giving her a moment's time for hesitation.

When they reached the house, Eugene came out to meet them.

"Where is Donald?" asked Ray aside, as Gene helped her from the carriage.

"Up-stairs, sound asleep," he answered somewhat shortly, exasperated by her persistent interest in Donald.

"You have come none too soon," he said to Blanche. "He has revived again, and is asking for you; but he has not long to live."

Blanche, trembling from head to foot, took his arm without speaking, and permitted him to lead her to the sick-room. The patient was apparently asleep, but hearing footsteps he opened his eyes.

"Blanche! Blanche!" he cried, as the beautiful face turned toward him. "Come tell me that you forgive me, Blanche," he entreated.

"Yes, I forgive you, Mr. Gilderman," she said with icy precision.

"Go nearer to him, dear. See, he is trying to put out his hand," whispered Ray, turning to follow Gene into the hall.

"Don't go!" said Blanche. "I want you with me."

"Then come tell him that you truly forgive him, dear," she said beseechingly, drawing Blanche to the bedside, all her own hatred giving way to pity. Blanche would fain have hardened her heart, but

she was not proof against the mute appeal of that white death-stricken face and wasted hand.

"I do forgive you, even as I hope to be forgiven," she said gently, kneeling by the bed; but she did not touch the outstretched hand.

"'Even as I hope to be forgiven,'" he repeated brokenly. But the effort had been too much for him. There was suddenly a gurgling sound, and again the blood choked his utterance. Involuntarily Blanche put her handkerchief to his lips to stanch the red tide; but before Ray could summon Gene from the hall, his patient was dead.

And this was the news that greeted and staggered Donald when late that evening he wakened from his heavy sleep. Like Gene, he had been fully persuaded that the man would recover,—he was prepared for that, and believed himself reconciled to it,—and this unlooked-for ending of the drama awed and unnerved him. It almost seemed as if he might have crept down in his sleep, and done the deed to which he had been tempted; and when at last, thinking that Gene might need his help, he rallied sufficiently to go into the death-room, he went softly and reverently, too thoroughly humbled to harbor an exultant thought in the presence of his dead foe. But there was nothing for him to do; Eugene, with the assistance of the Crague undertaker, having made all the necessary preparations. In a pocket memorandum-book belonging to the deceased, there had been found full directions concerning the disposal of his body in case he died

among strangers; and in accordance with these directions, no reply to Eugene's telegram having been received, the remains were carried out the next day, after a brief prayer by Mr. Pencroft, — the two young men acting as pall-bearers, — and consigned to the care of the undertaker to be sent to the city.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ANCHORED.

FOR weeks after this event, Keith kept aloof from Gullnest Cottage.

"Donald has deserted us," said Ray one evening, in a tone so full of regret that Dr. Pencroft, to whom the remark was made, was newly disheartened.

"Yet surely she must know that he loves Blanche too well ever to care for any one else, even if Blanche should again refuse him," he said to himself, his pity outweighing his jealousy; and for her sake, as well as his own, he wished with all his soul that Donald would come to an understanding with Blanche, and put an end to this unsatisfactory state of affairs. But Donald seemed in no haste to press his suit. In fact, the fiery ordeal through which he had passed had left him with such a sense of humility and self-distrust that he felt unworthy to ask the love he craved. But one October afternoon, by what was apparently the merest chance, the opportunity came to him that he had so long hungered for, yet had not dared to seek. He had the night before received a letter offering him a professorship in a well-known college; and all day

he had been in the woods trying to come to a decision in regard to it. Still undecided, he had turned about, and was on his way to his boat, when he saw Blanche and her boy coming along the unfrequented path that led to the water. She was looking pale and sad; and while he was wondering whether it would be possible to pass her with merely a bow, baby Rob, in his efforts to catch a leaf that had come floating through the sunshine like a golden-winged butterfly, lost his balance, and went down on his nose.

Before Blanche could reach him, Donald had sprung forward and picked him up; and where there is a child to be comforted, it is a hard matter for those on whom the comforting devolves to be distant and formal toward each other.

"I will take him now," said Blanche, when Donald with a handful of acorns had succeeded in quieting the little fellow.

"He is too heavy for you to carry," said Donald, setting him on his feet. But the baby had recognized his friend, and refused to be parted from him.

"Tarry Wob aden," he said, putting out his chubby hands; and the next instant he was seated in state on Donald's shoulder.

"He is too heavy for you, I am afraid," said Blanche; at which Donald laughed in his grave way, and stretched out his right arm.

"What are such brawn and sinews for if not for carrying burdens?" he said; and then suddenly all

the restraint that he had so long put upon himself gave way.

"O Blanche, Blanche! if you would only let me carry your burdens for you!" he cried, stopping and facing her. "Have I not been patient? Have I not been faithful?"

"Yes, patient and faithful, Donald," she answered with quivering lips; "but it would seem like wronging you to let you burden yourself for life with my boy."

"Can you not trust me to be a father to him?" said the young man, leaning his face against the child, who was still resting on his shoulder. "He has given me his love already: may I not claim the mother's too?"

"O Donald, it is such a poor sad heart to offer you!" she said sorrowfully.

"If it loves me, that is all I ask," he said gravely; and though she stood so near that Rob's chubby fingers were playing with her hat-strings, he would not so much as touch her hand until she had answered him.

"It has never loved any one else, Donald," she said; and then her head went down into the baby's lap, and Donald held them both in his arms.

Baby Rob showed his appreciation of this unusual proceeding by beginning to laugh and crow; and when a little later Ray saw them coming homeward arm in arm, with the baby smiling down on them from his lofty perch, she knew the whole story. The next day, as she was returning on foot

from an errand in the village, Pencroft overtook her, and reined in his horse.

"Have you seen Donald?" she asked eagerly.

"No," answered the doctor somewhat curtly.

"Then, you haven't heard the good news," she exclaimed, too pre-occupied to notice the change in his manner. "Blanche has accepted him, Gene, and Donald at last is a happy man. Blanche, too, seems very happy; and I am sure Donald deserved to be rewarded, he has been patient so long."

There was no mistaking the genuine gladness in her voice and face; and Eugene with a sudden resolve threw himself from his horse, and walked beside her with bared head.

"I know of some one else who has been equally patient," he said. "Should not he, too, be rewarded?"

"But of course she couldn't reward them both," said the girl, wilfully misinterpreting him. But the pleading eyes and the gravely tender voice made her ashamed of her playful hypocrisy.

"What reward does he want?" she asked archly, with drooping lashes.

"He wants you," he said boldly, stopping short and facing her; while Boreas, taking advantage of the situation, began to browse by the roadside.

Ray lifted a pair of dewy eyes, and the young man knew that he was answered; but a public road at midday is not propitious for the expression of sentiment, and they walked on in silence. A farmer was passing with a load of vegetables, but he was

too intent in speculating on the prices he was likely to get for his cabbages and potatoes, to notice their happy faces. A little girl tripped by, with her school-books under her arm; and they responded to her bird-like "good-morning" with a deeper meaning in their voices than the child could guess.

"It is a good morning," said Gene quietly.

They had reached the orchard-gate; and, taking both her hands in his, he lifted them to his lips.

"My darling!" he whispered. Then he sprang into the saddle, and gave Boreas the rein, while Ray went up the orchard-path conscious of a glory about her brighter than that of the October sunshine.

"'Clare for it!" said Dido, "I nebber did see in all my bown days how things in dis yere fam'ly am sarcumnabigatin' roun'."

"I told you so," answered Silas Crane oracularly. "Anybody kin see with one eye shut, that it was all fore-ordinated."

"Go 'long wid yo' nonsense!" said Dido disdainfully. "All de fo'ordinatin' dere am about dat am dat folks hab dun come to dere senses, an' rudder late in de day too. Mought hab sabed a power ob triberlation to demsel's an' all dere frien's, ef dey'd jes' dun gone de right way to begin wid."

Early in the winter Blanche and Donald were married. Eugene pleaded for a double wedding; but Mr. Braddington said, "We must have our holiday first." And Eugene, knowing that it would be but a sorry holiday to the gray-haired man if Ray did not share it with him, generously yielded

the point. Mrs. Braddington would gladly have remained at Gullnest, but her husband and Ray refused to go without her.

"If we like it, perhaps we shall conclude to make our home there," said Mr. Braddington, as they completed their arrangements for spending the winter in town in the old Braddington mansion. But in May they leased the house, and returned to Crague.

"It seems more homelike here," said Mrs. Braddington; and Mr. Braddington, though he had enjoyed immensely his long vacation, settled down at his old desk with a feeling of utter content,—a content which even Ray's marriage a month later did not lessen, for it had been decided long before that Ray and her husband were to live at Gullnest Cottage.

A year or two later, Donald received and accepted a call to a professorship in a well-known college.

"He is a giant in more ways than one," said the president; while as for the students, though they dubbed him the "Colossus of Rhodes," and were inclined at first to smile at his plainness of speech and manner, they have learned to regard him with a rare mingling of admiration and respect.

"It is astonishing what power some of you self-made men possess," said a fellow-professor one day, after having inquired in what college he was matriculated.

"Begging your pardon," replied Professor Keith, "I am not a self-made, but a mother-made, man."

My mother was literally my *Alma Mater*. All that is best in me I owe to her." And Margaret Keith is a happy woman, feeling that her prayers for both him and Blanche are answered.

Sally Decker is the comfort and support of her father and aunt in their old age, and in her vocation as nurse is loved and respected in all the region round about Crague. At Gullnest there is always a welcome for her, and whenever there is sickness in the family her help is considered indispensable. For Ray, and for any one who belongs to her, she would lay down her life if necessary, for she feels that next to God she owes every thing to the brave friend who dared to stand by her in her trouble; and her friend, a happy wife and mother, does not cease to give thanks that she was permitted to rescue this sweet and womanly soul.

Dr. Pencroft has been much urged to establish himself in the city; but, like his wife, he loves the country, and though they usually spend a month or two in town during the winter, Crague is the only place they call home. To Rachel there is no other place in all the world that is half so dear. The cottage, it is true, has been so metamorphosed that one would hardly recognize it; but the elms still tower above it, the distant roar of the billows still mingles with the murmur of the nearer waters; across the meadows as of old comes the cool salt breath of the sea, while overhead the same stars that she has known from childhood still keep their nightly watch.

1.25

